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Beyond 3D

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screen
is the
future
p12



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AV MOMENTS
OF THE
NOUGHTIES

EXCLUSIVE five-page test:
Denon's mighty monster is
best disc-spinner around!

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CHIC**

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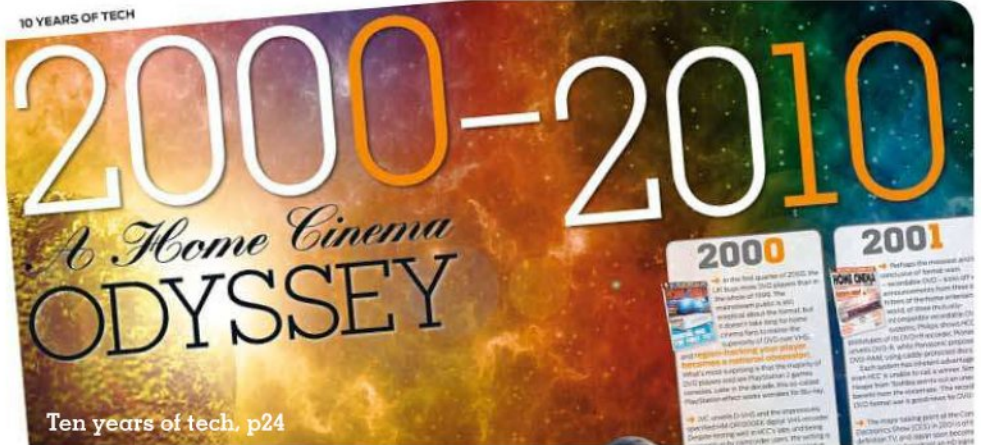
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WELCOME

A new decade has started, one that promises some incredible advancements in home cinema tech – 3DTV is on the way, and OLED may appear as a bigscreen format soon. However, it's something a touch more futuristic that's getting us excited at HCC...



Never yet seen outside of Japan, Sony's 360-degree photonic viewer could well be the step beyond polarised 3D we've all been dreaming of since the holographic displays in *Star Wars*. It's sci-fi stuff, but real – and on p12 we've got a world exclusive look.

But let's not forget the noughties – they've been good to AV-holics – so on page 24, we trawl through the last ten years worth of HCCs to take you through the highlights (and lowlights) of an amazing period for home entertainment. Meanwhile, in the here and now, we've only gone and exclusively reviewed **the best Blu-ray player in the world** – Denon's £4.5K universal DVD-A1UD. And LG's Seamless LED TV... And Focal's tasty-looking Dome sub/sat package... And Sony's £350 wonder AVR... And... You get the picture. Man, it's great to be a home cinema enthusiast *all* the time!

Rik Henderson

TEAM HCC

Rik Henderson:
Dep Ed Rik has worked on tech mags and videogames TV shows for two decades



Anton van Beek:
News Ed Anton began his pro-videophile career over 11 years ago



Mark Craven:
HCC's Production Editor can write shorthand – he can't read it, though



Steve May:
HCC's Editor-in-Chief has a stunning 20+ years as a CE journo on his clock



Chris Jenkins:
Our ISF-calibrated Tech Labs Manager is the former Editor of *Total DVD* mag



John Rook:
Art Editor John first worked on HCC back in 1999, when TVs were made of wood



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TECH LABS

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Equipment reviewed in Home Cinema Choice is measured and quantified by Future Tech Labs, which for more than 15 years has set the standard for independent AV test & measurement. The findings of the Tech Labs are used to underpin the subjective opinions of our Reviews team, ensuring that you receive the best-possible advice when it comes to planning your next purchase

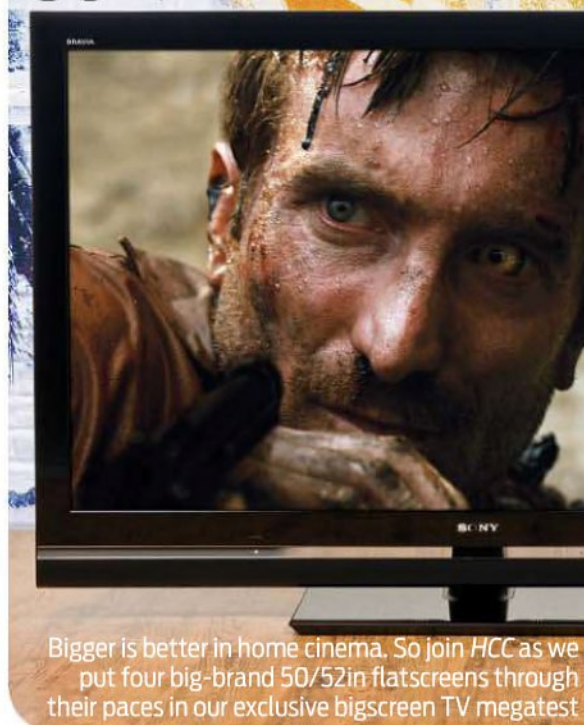


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CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business

Martin Pipe:
Technology specialist
Martin co-developed HCC's
Tech Lab operation



Alvin Gold:
One of the UK's most
experienced and respected
hi-fi and audio experts



Richard Stevenson:
Industry veteran and former
Editor of UK CE trade
journal ERT



Jim Hill:
Apple fanatic Hill is the
former editor of T3 Home
and a What Hi-Fi escapee



Barry Fox:
A veteran commentator on
consumer electronics in
mags like New Scientist



Danny Philips:
Former Editor of What Video
& High-Definition TV and
dedicated AV boffin



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In this retro special, we take a look back at the technological milestones and greatest AV moments of the last decade

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From 3D Blu-ray to Cell TV, we reveal the 50 hottest AV products coming in 2010...

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BULLETIN

→ **News highlights** **AVR R.I.P?** Why 3D Blu-ray could spell the end for your new AV receiver **SIM2 EVOLVES** Projector favourite shows off its debut LED model **BEYOND 3D** Exclusive look at Sony's futuristic display tech **BACK WITH A BANG!** Bang & Olufsen unveils LED TV with integrated Blu-ray deck **DEMO'D** One-stop guide to the AV highlights of *Star Trek*

Step-up-box

Virgin Media V+ HD → www.virginmedia.com

Virgin Media has recently introduced a swanky new, Samsung-built V+ HD set-top-box to its cable TV service. Replacing the Scientific-Atlantic boxes, which date back to the NTL and Telewest days, the SMT-H3110 PVR has the same hard drive capacity as the previous model, 160GB, but is more compact, runs quieter and cleans up the menu system when outputting high-def video at 1080i. In addition, it adds support for MPEG-4 for possible use later down the line. Intriguing...



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High-end Vision

Bang and Olufsen BeoVision 7-55
www.bang-olufsen.com



Premium AV brand Bang and Olufsen has added a new 55in model to its BeoVision 7 range of LCDs. Priced in the region of £12,000, the BeoVision 7-55 benefits from LED backlighting and local dimming, and the VisionClear picture improvement tech and 120Hz refresh rate of B&O's BeoSystem 3 video engine. And if that's not enough to get you excited, it also features an integrated Profile 2.0 Blu-ray player!

Partner with...

Jamo Reference R 907
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You're going to want a stylish pair of speakers to go with B&O's LED TV, and we can't think of a better match than these open-baffle beauties from Danish audio twiddlers Jamo. Avoiding the dynamics and precision-affecting resonance caused by speaker cabinets, the dipolar Reference R 907s feature two 12in woofers, a 5.5in midrange and a customised 1in tweeter to ensure they sound every bit as good as they look.
www.jamo.com

Pocket Blu-ray



If you've been eyeing Marantz's UD9004 flagship Blu-ray player, but are put off

by the £5K price, then take a look at the company's recently released UD8004. This new BD/DVD/SACD/DVD-Audio spinner squeezes a host of tech from the UD9004 into a smaller package at a more wallet-friendly price of £2,300. Features include an Anchor Bay ABT2015 processor, 192kHz/24bit Burr-Brown DACs, an audio 'pure direct' mode, 7.1 analogue audio outputs, and Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD decoders.

First iPlayer TV



British brand Cello has unveiled another line-up of innovative LCDs to follow its range of TVs that

can record to SD cards. Available from Marks & Spencer until the end of February, Cello's iViewer £400 HD Ready 26in and £500 Full HD 32in LCD TVs have an Ethernet connection and integrated iPlayer access, without the need for a set-top box. The software engine allows SD iPlayer usability, YouTube access, RSS feed widgets and DLNA support.

Humax debuts Freeview HD box



Humax's Freeview HD-receiving HD-FOX T2 could become one of the most

sought-after bits of AV gear. Due to retail soon for around £170, it also offers UPnP client functionality for media streaming from networked devices – and the company says future updates will add single-tuner PVR functionality, including recording and time-shifting to USB-connected gear.

A 500GB dual-tuner PVR model will launch in the run-up to the World Cup.

No AVR's support 3D Blu-ray

Be prepared to add a new AV receiver to your 3D kit list

The introduction of 3D home entertainment hardware through 2010 will bring more than its fair share of confusion. And while most AV fans will have realised that a new 3D-compatible TV is required, alongside an entirely new 3D-compatible Blu-ray player (or a PS3 with Sony's promised 3D-enabling firmware update – ETA unknown), the realisation that your AV receiver also has to be replaced will probably only have dawned on a few people.

But this unwelcome truth was confirmed by Hideki Yamada, the man responsible for Pioneer's run of award-winning AVRs, as well as other industry sources.

'According to our engineers, no current AV receiver can pass through the v1.4 HDMI signal correctly, which is required to enjoy 3D video. Users will need to rewire their systems to take this into account,' explained Yamada. 'We are planning to introduce our first HDMI v1.4 receiver in Spring of 2010, first in the US, then Europe and Asia.'

PS3 users with firmware-upgraded consoles as their home cinema source are likely to be the first caught out. The catch is that a movie's lossless audio track (be it bitstream or PCM) is delivered via the same HDMI link from the console. If the AVR is not HDMI v1.4 compliant, it will not deliver a 3D image through to the screen. Go direct to the screen, and you lose the high-resolution audio

If you want 3D, you might need a new amp



Pioneer's Hideki Yamada says it will have an HDMI v1.4 AVR on sale by Spring

track. (Quite how Sony is managing to squeeze 3D over the PS3's HDMI v1.3 output has yet to be revealed).

The revelation will also hit the custom install industry, particularly those who have existing HDMI cable linking components buried in walls. Upgrading such high-end theatres will prove costly.

Extra audio

On the plus side, Pioneer's Yamada acknowledges that 3D may stimulate new types of audio post-processing. Visually, a 3D presentation creates a new screen plane, which appears to be a few feet in front of the viewer. Separated from the actual screen, it's this which creates a sense of depth. So does this mean a new type of DSP processing is needed? One which might create a centre-forward audio position in addition to the normal LCR arrangement?

'We have been discussing this topic with Dolby, DTS and THX, but like us they have no answers,' concedes the engineer. 'But once 3D imaging becomes available in home theatre, I think

everybody will need to look at this question. To be honest, we're not sure how 3D might be realised in sound just yet.'



Playlist...

Team HCC reveals its Playback picks of the last month

1 Goemon (BD Japanese Import)



Stunning fantasy from Casshern director with amazing CGI sets and 6.1 audio. Look for a Western release in 2010. *Steve May*

2 Moon (All-region BD)



This is old school sci-fi at its best and proof that you don't need big bucks to make a captivating movie. *Rik Henderson*

3 The Proposal (R2 DVD)



Romcom stalwarts Sandra Bullock and Ryan Reynolds strut their lurve stuff. *Mark Craven*

4 Battlestar Galactica: The Plan (All-region BD)



I'll make any excuse to delve back into the world of BSG, and this BD movie delivers plenty of Cylon goodness. *Anton van Beek*

5 Battles BC: Season One (R2 DVD)



Taking its stylistic cues from 300, this History Channel series looks great and might even teach you a thing or two. *John Rook*

Demo'd!

This issue, the Blu-ray highlights of... *Star Trek* on Blu-ray

Star war



01.55: The *Star Trek* reboot kicks off with a bang as the *USS Kelvin* goes head-to-head with a giant Romulan mining vessel. Missiles are fired, explosions abound and the film's Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix has you feeling every impact.

Running wild



11.57: As the action moves to Iowa and the teen Kirk's spot of joy-riding, the AVC 2.40:1 encode shows its true colours with an image full of depth and detail. You can even see every spot of dirt on the car's windscreen.

Mr lover lover



30.03: This might be a younger Kirk than fans are used to, but he's still a ladies man. Here he finds time to get it on with an Orion hotty and sneaks a peek at Uhura in her underwear. At least it shows how well the encode handles fleshtones of all colours!

Dive into action



46.59: From the *USS Enterprise*'s arrival at Vulcan to the orbital skydive onto the drilling platform and the following fight, this epic 12-minute sequence has some exceptional positional audio that puts you right at the heart of the onscreen action.

From batcave to living room

SIM2's been busy building a £25K projector and an LED model

Italian projector specialist SIM2 will have four LED projectors available by the end of 2010, according to its UK managing director Alan Roser. The first of these, a £15,000 model dubbed the MICO 50, was shown to HCC during a demo session at the British Film Institute.

The MICO 50 replaces the usual UHP lamp and colour wheel assembly of single-chip DLP by a trio of high power PhlatLight LEDs. This has a number of benefits. 'By removing the lamp, we're saving the planet,' joked Roser. 'Getting rid of the colour wheel also means that there's no acoustic noise. And the rainbow effect has been eliminated'.

To test the claims of LED's larger and more accurate colour gamut, HCC got Roser to spin the Blu-ray of the Technicolor horror *Suspiria* through the MICO 50 on a 12-foot screen at the BFI, and the results were phenomenal, delivering eye-scorching washes of deep reds and blues with consummate ease. Even with the lights up at the end of the demo, the image still looked excellent.

SIM2's commitment to LED technology will increase throughout 2010. Of the three models that will appear over the course of the year, two will be introduced to sit below the MICO 50, with another one released to sit above it in the range.

Alongside the MICO 50, Roser demo'd SIM2's latest addition to its premium-level C3X range.

Priced around £25,000, the 3-chip DLP C3X LUMIS has been designed to 'bring the projector out of the Batcave home cinema and into the living room.' To this end, it features the company's DynamicBlack tech and a bespoke ALPHAPATH light engine to improve brightness and the efficiency of light transmission.



Alan Roser says SIM2's LED projector eliminates the DLP rainbow effect

When it comes to setting up a big screen in a traditional home environment, the SIM2 MD doesn't think there's a better alternative out there. 'If you take a 103in plasma, it's a specialist installation and they consume a whopping 1,800W of power! Our solution, with the right screen, is to be able to use a projector in the living room... and to this end we're bringing the negative gain Black Diamond projector screen from Screen Innovations into the UK.'

3D on the way

Roser also explained the company's 3D plans, confirming that two solutions are scheduled for release in the third quarter of 2010. First up will be a dual-projector based around INFINITEC stereo display technology (for a detailed look, visit www.infinitec.net), which will be followed by a single-projector polarisation model.



The MICO 50 uses a trio of PhlatLight LEDs



Undead again



Films about the undead have an uncanny lifeforce of their own, as shown by Ruben Fleischer's debut feature *Zombieland*. Boasting stellar turns by Woody Harrelson and Jesse Eisenberg, this zomcom did big box office business and we expect it to do the same on DVD and Blu-ray when it's released on 22 March. Extras on both formats will include a chat track by the cast and crew, deleted scenes and two featurettes, while the BD version gets a behind-the-scenes PiP track and Sony's MovieIQ and Cinechat.

We wants it!



Warner Home Video has confirmed that the US Blu-ray of *The Lord of the Rings: The Motion Picture Trilogy* boxset will come out on April 6, for around \$100. The 9-disc set features three Blu-ray discs (one for each film) and six DVDs (one extra-feature disc for each movie, plus a Digital Copy of each). The films are only presented in their original theatrical cuts, with the Extended Editions due to hit Blu-ray around the release of the bigscreen adaptation of *The Hobbit*. Sadly, there's no word on a UK release at this time.

Pixar flies high



Walt Disney Home Entertainment has announced that Pixar's latest animated blockbuster *Up* will land in the UK on DVD and Blu-ray on February 15. The 'toon will hit Blu-ray as a combo pack with both the hi-def and DVD versions. The former will feature an AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode, DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio and a wealth of extras, including a Cine-Explore picture-in-picture video commentary, seven featurettes, the animated short *Partly Cloudy* and a spin-off.

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Pick'n'mix

Visual effects producer Stefan Drury picks his five favourite DVDs...



1 Aliens

If the 'Well, you're not reading *it* right!' scene isn't the best scene ever then...

2 Se7en

Enjoying such a desperately grim film should be so wrong – but it feels so right.

3 Back to the Future

When I was a kid I wanted to be time-travelling skateboard whiz Marty McFly. Actually, I still do.

4 Die Hard

That balding guy from *Moonlighting* in an action film? It will never work...

5 Predator

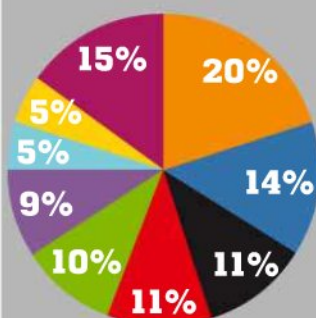
The coolest screen alien ever versus Arnold Schwarzenegger in his prime – FIGHT!

Stefan Drury is the Head of Visual Effects at London-based LipSync Post, and has been working in the industry for the last 11 years. His credits include work on *Die Another Day*, *Wimbledon*, *Alien vs Predator*, *Stardust*, *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, *Nowhere Boy* and the upcoming Nic Cage movie *Kick-Ass*.

We asked...

Which of the following major AV brands released the best kit in 2009?

■ Pioneer ■ Panasonic
 ■ Samsung ■ Onkyo
 ■ Sony ■ Denon
 ■ Philips
 ■ Yamaha
 ■ Other



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

One step beyond 3D?

Japanese giant gives us a sneak peek at its futuristic display tech

Forget plain old 3D, could the future of display technology really lie with holographic-style visuals? Well, that's one idea currently being explored by the boffins at Sony.

During a recent visit to the company's Tokyo HQ, HCC was given an exclusive look at one possible evolution of display tech – a 360-degree Auto-Stereoscopic Viewer. This small cylindrical unit displays an image that can be viewed as if it was hanging in a three-dimensional space.

Don't expect it to replace large flatscreen TVs any time soon; the first-generation prototype we played with offered full-colour static imagery that looked somewhat coarse and pixelated, but it still represents a startling piece of technology that hints at all kinds of futuristic applications.

Hiroki Kikuchi, one of Sony's elite band of Distinguished Engineers, heads up the Photonics Development Department responsible for the 360 Viewer's R&D. He told HCC that the product had been in development for just 18 months but it's already clear that possible applications for it are many and varied. 'Digital signage is the most obvious, but communications, virtual pets, even medical applications are possible,' he mused.

The content we were shown ranged from cartoon characters to planetary bodies and real people. When viewed with one eye shut, these appeared two dimensional, but with both eyes open they gained substance and depth. With a remote control, we were able to select from an internal library containing hundreds of such images, flicking them up as if they were TV channels. It was



The 360 view tech could be used in a range of apps says Sony's Hiroki Kikuchi

also possible to trigger them to either rotate or freeze. And yes, you can walk entirely around the image; it appears to be fully three-dimensional. You could even look down into the content, or peer upwards, and the illusion remained intact. While obviously limited at the moment, it still proved to be mesmerizing entertainment. Not so much 3D as 4D.

Predictably, Kikuchi would not comment on the technology inside the viewer. 'To show such a stereoscopic image I can say that we need to display 360 different images in 360-degrees,' is all he would say. 'Put another way, that means we show a different image every one degree.' To capture the 360-degree images, Kikuchi's team simply use a camcorder and a rotating platform: 'It's a simple studio. We shoot our subject and then take 360 frames from the recording'.

At this moment, image resolution is limited to 128 x 96 pixels. 'Multiply this by 360 and you have a 3D image constructed of around 4 million pixels,' said Kikuchi. The obvious next step is to add animation, an advance Kikuchi describes as 'not too tough'.

Wherever the development leads, HCC can't help feel that it's just had an early glimpse at the possible sci-fi future of AV.

360-degrees of separation: Sony's model was convincing from all angles

Linn ditches CD players



Are the days of the CD player numbered? It might appear that way given the surprise announcement from

high-end home manufacturer Linn Products Limited, that it will be ceasing production of CD players in 2010. In what the company is describing as 'a testament to the supremacy of digital streaming technology,' Linn is instead shifting its focus onto its DS digital music streamers and the ability to download 192kHz original studio masters to listen to in the home.

Blu-ray style icon



Philips plans to 're-write the standard for build quality and design in the mid-range segment' with the latest BDP7500 Blu-ray deck. Described as 'a player that looks as good as the hi-def pictures and sound it produces,' this eye-catching Profile 2.0 machine will sell for around £250 and features onboard decoding for Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA, a full set of 7.1 analogue outputs, 1GB internal memory, playback from USB devices and support for a variety of file formats including DivX Ultra, JPEG, MP3 and H.264.

Sony scores 3D goal



Sony has kicked off its 3D game plan with an announcement that up to 25 World Cup football matches will be shot in 3D using its Pro 3D cameras and acquisition hardware. The corporation says that this 'will provide coverage of the action that is unprecedented in depth, vividness and excitement.' Public screenings of the time-delayed matches will take place in London, Berlin, Mexico City, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Rome and Sydney. A 3D BD highlights disc will follow.

This month's top ten news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



Toshiba's Cell Regza TV offers HD-a-plenty

1 HD on demand

Toshiba's first Cell-powered TV finally made it into stores in Japan in December. The LED-backlit Regza 55X1 1080p LCD TV isn't cheap, retailing for around 100,000 Yen (roughly £10,000), but you get a lot of bang for your buck, including a staggering 15 tuners and the fact that it continually records all eight of Japan's HD terrestrial TV channels to a 3TB HDD, so there is always 26 hours of TV to choose from!

2 Swap shop

In other Tosh news, the company has revealed that it is working on a Freeview HD Blu-ray/HDD recorder for release in the UK later this year. While the company is refusing to talk about release dates, we expect it to be with us in time for the FIFA World Cup.

3 Sanyosonic

After some 18 months of talks, Panasonic has completed its purchase of Sanyo for just over \$4.5 billion. Panasonic is keen to take advantage of Sanyo's green credentials, having already announced a home monitoring station for energy consumption as the potential first product of the buy-out.

4 Flipping hell!

Universal Studios has brought its 'flipper' disc concept to Blu-ray. Featuring a BD copy of the movie on one side of the disc, and the DVD version on the other, the line kicked off in the US with the recent re-release of the *Bourne...* movies. While the idea is sound in principle, anybody familiar with the company's HD DVD combo discs will undoubtedly remember the playback problems the technology caused.

5 The Big Bang

The US Justice Department is to investigate tech giants Sony, Toshiba and Hitachi to see if they wield too much power in the optical drive market. This follows the campaign to root out price-fixing by firms like LG and Hitachi in supplying LCD TVs and parts.

6 Sales magic

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (reviewed on p101) delivered record-breaking first day sales in the UK, making it the fastest-selling DVD and Blu-ray release of 2009. Warner claims that some 840,000 units were sold on the first day, of which 53,000 were BD.

7 LG gets ambitious

LG Electronics clearly believes that 3D is the future of home entertainment given its rather bold claim that it hopes to shift 400,000 3D TVs this year, rising to 3.4 million units in 2011!

8 Samsung boosts LCD production

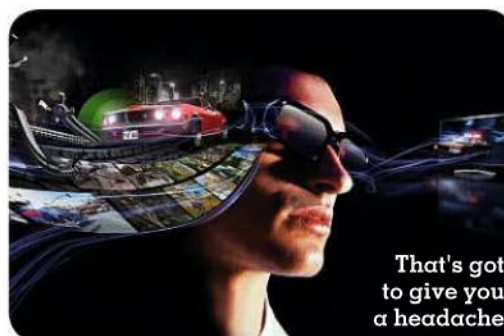
Already a leader in the production of eighth-generation LCD glass, Samsung is planning to invest around £260 million into its Tangjeong plant to boost turnover. The site currently produces 60,000 LCD glass units a month, but could rise to 90,000.

9 Xbox 360 iPlayer delayed indefinitely?

Talks between the BBC and Microsoft, designed to make the BBC iPlayer available on the Xbox360 console, are rumoured to have hit a stumbling block. Sources claim that it's all down to Microsoft's desire to charge for platforms on Xbox Live, something incompatible with the BBC's public service remit.

10 3D BD PC

Leading GPU and chipset manufacturer Nvidia has already started working on 3D solutions for consumers who use their PC as their primary Blu-ray player. The company claims that its GeForce GT240, GeForce GT220 and forthcoming GF1000 GPUs are all BDA-approved for the playback of 3D content encoded with the AVC Multi-View Codec (AVC-MVC). Used in conjunction with 3D-enabled monitors and Nvidia's 3D Vision active-shutter glasses, the company reckons consumers could build a 3D HD home entertainment PC for less than £1,000.



That's got to give you a headache

Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Thanks Hanks!



Steven Spielberg's oft-mooted and unnecessary plan to remake the classic 1950 James Stewart movie *Harvey* seems to have been scrapped. The man we can thank is the director's first choice for the lead, Tom Hanks, who reportedly balked at taking over a role previously played by the Hollywood legend.

The undead go 3D

With the excellent *Zombieland* coming to DVD and BD in the UK soon (see p10), what better news than industry sources revealing Sony Pictures is fast-tracking a sequel to the hit horror-comedy to be shot in 3D!

Zombie to do CSI?

Sticking with zombies, well, musician-turned-filmmaker Rob Zombie, rumour is that the Halloween remake-helmer is currently in talks to direct an episode of 'a popular series based around forensic crime investigation'. Given his love of hillbillies, could it be *CSI: Ozarks*?

Burton's spooky shadows

Fresh from *Alice in Wonderland*, oddball director Tim Burton and his regular leading man Johnny Depp are set to shoot their cinematic re-imagining of the gothic TV soap *Dark Shadows* later this year. Producer Graham King has confirmed that cameras will roll in September or October.

Riddick returns



Remember the ace sci-fi horror *Pitch Black* and its bloated sequel *The Chronicles of Riddick*? Well, writer/director David Twohy is said to be bringing Vin Diesel's character back a third time. We hope it's more like the original.

News x10

'The systems start at £60K...'

Advanced signal processing is changing the sound of high-end AV. **Martin Pipe** talks to Rob Sinden about the science behind some of the world's most desirable home cinema gear



There have been remarkable advances in digital sound technologies over the years, none more so than from Lyngdorf Audio, the Danish exponent of cutting-edge signal

processing. DSP signal tweaking is common on most integrated amps, but the ingenuity of the Lyngdorf proposition (which effectively allows audio to transcend the physical confines of any listening space) is startling.

To learn more, *HCC* sat down with Rob Sinden (pictured), head of Lyngdorf's UK distributor Gecko. Sinden has been a long-standing advocate of high-end audio and video and was an early convert to the potential of Lyngdorf. More recently the brand has attracted attention by partnering with audio legend Steinway...

We were blown away by the first Steinway Lyngdorf system (*HCC* #170). It's an interesting alliance...

Lyngdorf is the technology partner behind the collaboration, while Steinway is

involved in the manufacture and the aesthetic design.

Lyngdorf's gear traditionally keeps stereo audio (music) as a digital signal throughout its electronics, so far less noise and colouration is added to the recording. Keeping the signal digital also means that any acoustic errors listening rooms may create can be reduced without compromising sound quality. That's normally not possible with traditional analogue amps. As a result, Lyngdorf digital audio systems will give far more consistent results from room to room.

Now the company has teamed up with Steinway [makers of premium musical instruments] to create a home cinema solution that keeps the signal in the digital domain throughout. That's important, as the audio signal in a home cinema goes through a lot more decoding than in a stereo hi-fi system. Even more noise is added.

The benefits of Steinway Lyngdorf's systems don't stop with the fidelity. While others may achieve reference volume levels up to 4 metres away, Steinway Lyngdorf's can fill rooms over 50m long. Also, thanks to their unique room correction features,

they will vary less than 2dB from room to room, rather than over 15dB from most other reference systems.

And with a signal-to-noise ratio of 113dB rather than a typical 80dB or less, the sounds you hear are not accompanied by the noise that other systems create.

Traditionally, hi-fi purists will argue that the signal path should be as pure as possible. The Lyngdorf approach seems at odds with this...

That obsession with keeping the signal path pure is completely logical, but the fact is that with any other brand you are immediately aware of the 'sound' of these components. With Lyngdorf and Steinway Lyngdorf systems, your music is being reproduced with nothing added by your equipment. The difference is really dramatic when you first hear it.

There's some heavy science behind Lyngdorf room correction. But how difficult is it to use? Do you need to be an expert to set it up?

It has evolved quite a bit over the 11 years since the first [system] was introduced. When I first came across the room correction, it was something that needed a lot of experience to set up. But the current incarnation – called 'RoomPerfect' – is simple enough for anyone to set up, and doesn't require the laptop of its predecessors. It's built into the Lyngdorf stereo amps, as well as the Steinway Lyngdorf music and home theatre systems.

But if you have a dedicated listening room or theatre, then the benefits must be minimal?

At Gecko we've built what I hope is the best acoustic space in the country – maybe some recording studios are better, but beyond that... Dimensions and angles, wall construction, acoustic treatment



Peter Lyngdorf developed the Millennium, the world's first truly digital stereo amplifier





Steinway Lyngdorf cinema systems are aimed at the luxury end of the market

– the designers (a company called Rives Audio) has factored in absolutely everything possible.

The speakers are Miller and Kreisel 150s, which we've used for years – and a lot of top film studios still use them for mixing their movies. We've also got some very powerful analogue amps and Audyssey room correction (which will make up to 10,000 corrections per channel, and has a resolution of a completely different order from any other EQ we've tried). We've approached it as you would a professional system – put in the kinds of speaker they mix a lot of the films with, together with very good amps and room correction. And it sounds superb. But in my experience, the Steinway Lyngdorf system absolutely wipes the floor with it. It's simply far more advanced.

So how does RoomPerfect work?

Well, say you've bought Bowers & Wilkins, Dali, KEF or whatever speakers, you presumably like the sound of them. RoomPerfect is not trying to change the sound of that speaker – instead, it's trying to remove the effect the room has on the speakers. The general point I'd make is that there's no such thing as a perfect room – it just doesn't exist. If you take a hi-fi system and move it from one room to another, it will sound quite different. The ironic thing is that a lot of dealers' demo rooms are worse than the average consumer's living room.

Often the walls of their demonstration rooms are cheap, lightweight partitions. It's like trying to have a party in a biscuit tin, it's so reflective and echoey. Room correction can improve that considerably – it can't stop walls from resonating, obviously, and if you've got a bad speaker no amount of correction can make it sound good. All room correction can do is make the speaker sound as good as its potential

allows. It brings a consistency from room to room, and from system to system.

There are 20,000 different audio frequencies flying around from multiple speakers with different responses, all arriving at different times. Some are hitting the floor or carpet first, while others might find a wall or a potted plant. Each one of these is going to do something different to the reflected sound that you hear.

What are your thoughts on home cinema room design?

The conventional way of doing things is to use diffusers and absorbers to deal with unwanted reflections. Doing things the Steinway Lyngdorf way, there are no unwanted reflections of any significance, and so you don't need this damping and absorption.

More and more people in this country are starting to realise that they have to consider some acoustic design or treatment as part of a high-end home-cinema install. The problem is that a lot of people offering that service really aren't very competent – they're just not acoustics experts. I've worked with a lot of so-called 'acousticians' in the past. A couple of them have been fantastic, but several others have been really lousy – they've not really understood small-room acoustics.

When you hear the Steinway Lyngdorf system in a completely untreated room, the difference is quite apparent. I think that most of the people who are going to go for these really high-end systems don't want to spend a lot of money on acoustic treatment. Indeed, I see it as a negative thing. In the cinema room that I used to have I had 10kW of amplification – much of the output of which was being absorbed!

In other words, you're putting tons of power into the room and then sucking it out with room treatment.

So what would a typical Steinway Lyngdorf home cinema system be?

There's a single processor it makes called the P1. That deals with all existing formats out there, and has the RoomPerfect technology built in. It links up to the digital power amps via proprietary cabling and connectors so it's digital all the way through. The company makes a variety of different speaker systems that bolt onto that. It's modular – you add as many power amps as you need. The systems start at around £60,000, but I'm using a £100,000 7.8 system in my demo room, with loads of the boundary woofers (pictured above) in there.

That's pretty pricey! What sort of upgrade path is there? Can you start off with two-channel and work your way up?

Lyngdorf equipment is stereo, but we are seeing lots of people who are changing to these systems from far more expensive conventional stereo systems. Many of these people are now adding conventional AV receivers and compact speakers for surround sound. That works really well, but it's an enthusiast's system.

A few installed Steinway Lyngdorf surround systems use the Model D stereo speakers – they've been purchased by those who want the best stereo as well as the best home theatre. If people have very large rooms, or they want crazy sound pressure levels, there's the Grand Theatre system which uses Steinway Lyngdorf's Model LS line-source speakers. A couple of film stars in the States have gone for those...

Book a demonstration at Gecko in Newbury, Berkshire (www.geckohomecinema.com, or call 0845 262 2882) to see if Steinway Lyngdorf really does make the world's best home cinema systems

MOVIE STAR



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POINT OF VIEW

This issue, **Richard Stevenson** writes the kind of column you can only get away with once a year

Ultra-thin screens, HD channels popping up all over the place, 3D display prototypes, Dolby Digital Pro-Logic IIz, Audyssey DSX 9.1-channel surround sound, interesting BD-Live applications and wireless HD streaming – 2009 was a great year for home cinema. But what will 2010 bring us? Time to dust off my trusty crystal ball...

January and CES transpires to be the best-attended consumer electronics show in history, as Microsoft lures in thousands of insecure herd-following badge snobs with free copies of Windows 7 for Mac. Apple shows off its planned Apple flatscreen TVs and the dribbling masses act like extras in *Resident Evil*.

The great LED war rages between Samsung and Sharp throughout **February**. Samsung takes an early lead with a TV offering a 2K x 4K array of individual LEDs, but Sharp trumps it with a TV claiming brightness akin to the surface of a supernova, and a claimed contrast ratio of 9.8 trillion to one.

March sees Panasonic use its UK trade event to evangelise plasma technology as having a solid future in the TV market. Three attending journalists and a dozen retailers are hospitalised by the ensuing hysterics.

The Sun newspaper runs a super soar-away spoof on **April** Fool's day about Bush-Alba TVs outperforming Sony Bravias. *Sun* readers rush to Argos and Sony's entire Japanese workforce are issued samurai swords to do the honourable thing. Sony's Eric Kingdon becomes head of new product development at... Bush-Alba.

May is a time of consolidation. Philips cuts thousands of mundane jobs and moves all its very best creative staff back to Amsterdam. Soon after, the company launches the Cool-Skin Ambilight shaver with PixelPlus Stubble, which goes on to be the best-selling consumer electronics product of the decade.

Sales of Dyson's Air Multiplier fan rocket in flaming **June**, particularly when Barry Fox discovers it's one of the only things available in the UK capable of receiving Freeview in high-definition.

Litigation abounds in **July**. John Archer sues Sharp for the sunburn he suffered while testing its supernova TV; Bang & Olufsen sues Loewe for beating it at its own game; and HCC's Martin Pipe sues Onkyo for a waffle-print burn on his face when he falls asleep on top of their latest hot-running amplifier.

In his **August** *DVD Addict* column, Anton van Beek suggests that Windows 7 is developing all too uncomfortably like Skynet. Later that month, The Beek is accosted by a Bill Gates-styled Terminator which threatens 'I'll be back'. To charge him for a Windows 7 update, presumably.

September and Denon uses the IFA technology show in Berlin to launch a flagship AV amplifier with full Artificial Intelligence that responds to the name Hal. Denon's Roger Batchelor buys a second-hand obelisk for the UK press launch.

October is a bad month for HCC staff: Richard Stevenson is lynched and has an Apple logo branded on his left buttock; Rik Henderson is run out of his flat by angry neighbours (led by his wife) fed up with the noise; and Adam Rayner is certified insane ... for the eighteenth year running.

In **November**, Pioneer runs out of product sectors to pull out of, so enters the turntable market to ensure it has got something to pull out of in 2011.

And finally, **December** 2010. HCC's new Ed-in-Chief, Steve May, begins wearing a tie; lets staff out early on Friday afternoons; and doubles freelance pay rates. Well, you can only dream.

For more of Richard Stevenson's ramblings log on to www.homecinemachoice.com/points_of_view

Richard Stevenson is now seriously considering growing a pointy goatee beard and an evil-looking moustache





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DVD ADDICT

This issue, **The Beek** frets about the future of independent film companies that can't survive on sales of discounted Blu-rays alone

Like many readers of this column, I've spent a lotta cash on Blu-ray discs over the past twelve months. My hi-def disc collection is growing exponentially – far more than I ever imagined at this early point in the hi-def format's life. This has been brought about by the swift drop in pricing for the discs, with big savings available both in store and, more especially, online – where 'Two-for-One offers on selected Blu-ray titles' seem to run in perpetuity. But while these discount prices have been very good for Blu-ray collectors across the UK, I'm starting to worry that the format is quickly becoming devalued from the perspective of the companies releasing the titles.

For the major Hollywood players like Sony, Universal, Paramount, 20th Century Fox, Disney and Warner Brothers, I'm sure this isn't a major worry yet, as their blockbuster titles bring in bags of cash, justifying their investment. But what about the smaller companies, the little independents that don't have the same kind of massive resources to draw upon?

What about the little people?

For some of these guys even releasing a title on DVD can be a struggle. Over the past decade, the big drop in the RRP for DVD platters, especially those smaller cult titles aimed at niche markets, has pretty much destroyed the margins. So the independent labels are struggling to justify serious investment for any individual title and are now having to look even harder at what might be worth bringing to market. Just look at the fate of Tartan Films, the UK world cinema heavyweight that went into administration in the Summer of 2008. Thankfully, the company has risen from the ashes as Palisades Tartan – following US-based Palisades Media Group's buyout of the company's

film library – but how many investment-heavy new releases are we going to see from it (such as Korean vampire film *Thirst*, pictured) as opposed to it re-using existing materials that have already been funded and produced?

One obvious answer to DVD's steadily declining RRP is the introduction of Blu-ray. The new format was positioned to deliver the margins the indie studios needed to justify their investments. But, just three years into Blu-ray's life, we're already seeing prices dip, especially for titles from the independent sector. Partly, this is due to the ever-present discounts and sales, which encourages people to expect lower pricing, and secondly, the slow sales of almost anything that isn't a brand-new Hollywood blockbuster.

One anonymous industry insider I spoke to made the following pessimistic claim on behalf of the struggling independents: **'Releasing a film on Blu-ray is the kind of investment and risk that's going to disappear from the UK market next year,** from the indies at least, unless the Blu-ray market can be sorted out. The sales are so bad, Blu-ray is becoming a bit of a white elephant. It's just a total mess, and when you hear that one big chain – and think how few there are of those any more – is thinking of discontinuing the format, you know you're in trouble.'

In the current climate, there's clearly no surefire solution. But, if we want to see independent studios releasing titles that succeed on Blu-ray, then disc sales will have to be the crucial driving force. And for this to happen, disc fans may have to change their shopping habits. If everyone waits a few months until their chosen movie is dumped in the sales rack, the format's future may be bleak.

For more dire predictions from *The Beek* go to www.homecinemachoice.com/dvd_addict

Anton van Beek's Blu-ray disc collection, like the Great Wall of China, is now so large that it can be seen from outer space



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TECH TANTRUM

Barry Fox takes the AV industry to task over confusing user manuals, and hardware that's never as good as it seems

Lucky you, people say. Getting to try all that new gear for free. Well, it's not all rosy in the tech journalist garden. Yes, it's good to find out what's worth buying without having to buy it first, but most of the time I am only too pleased to return what's been sent – I waste hours because the manufacturer has been too proud or too daft to watch what happens when a real-world user tries to use it 'out of the box.' Sony's new Walkman is a case in point.

The Japanese tech giant single-handedly created the mobile entertainment market with the cassette Walkman, but lost out digitally to Apple. Its iPod came with user-friendly iTunes, while Sony's digital players were crippled by a lack of MP3, user-hostile Sonic Stage software and Magic Gate DRM. The latest iteration looks more hopeful – but it's hard to say because old habits often die hard.

Sony launched its new gadget on a disused Tube platform deep under Charing Cross – where there was no radio signal to show off the wireless audio and video features. Still, I borrowed one of the latest Sony Ericsson Walkman multimedia phones to have a play with. It took me ten minutes to work out how to make a phone call.

The secret is buried on page 25 of the 36-page guide, under advice on photo editing, downloading feature movies (has anyone ever seen somebody actually watching a movie on a small phone screen?), and using USB. The pictures of the mysterious icons you press to dial are mostly illegible.

It's the same with other kit, promising something that's different from the finished product. For instance, the widely promoted Powermat promises to charge portables without cords. But the inductive mat only works if the portables have been retro-fitted with expensive sleeves that make them bigger and heavier – and they are only available for a limited range

of portables. I'll wait to see if Apple, Sony and Nokia really do as Powermat claims and build inductive coupling coils into their devices, or at least into replacement batteries.

And there's more...

Home network devices and media docks promise to play digital music, movie and photo files through a TV. The reality is that any WiFi or Ethernet network controlled by a PC can be relied on to fail without rhyme or reason, thanks to a firewall somewhere with a mind of its own. Another reality is that no device will be able to play every flavour of audio, video and photo – even when there is no DRM to deliberately block playback.

Verbatim's new 1080i HD-DVR has a 1Tb hard disk recorder, a DVB-T tuner (not labelled Freeview, to avoid royalties) and network media player for under £250. Sounds great! Yes, and one day it may be – if the clever German designers will first watch a stupid Englishman trying to use it. Sketchy and nearly useless instructions in 15 languages are split between two Quick Start guides. The rest is on a CD-ROM for computer play. The aerial input is incorrectly labelled 'TV In', there is no option for S-video connection and the TV channel scan software does not warn if the aerial feed is missing or poor. Even with an HDMI connection and settings set at 16:9, my screen showed squashed 4:3 pictures from live TV.

Try a firmware update, suggested Verbatim. The box has a broadband connection, but the Browser NET option is not a net browser and cannot download updates direct to the box. The user has to download to a PC, and then setup a local network connection or physically carry the update file across the room. It's at times like this that I want to meet and strangle whoever is spoiling what could be so good.

Have you experienced any AV hardware with awful user instructions? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.co.uk

With over 25 years experience as a home entertainment journalist, **Barry Fox** has read more manuals than he's had hot dinners



Tech diary

The world of AV and film changes fast. **HCC's calendar** is here to make sure you don't miss out

The Firm:
Hardcore hoolie
movie or
Fila advert?



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				15 The Book of Eli This post-apocalyptic actioner stars Denzel Washington as a man fighting his way across the US to protect a book that can save mankind. Check it out at UK cinemas from today www.sonypictures.net		17 'Cause I eats me spinach' Spinach-muncher and Olive Oyl-lover Popeye made his debut on this day in 1929, when creator Elzie Crisler Segar's first Popeye the Sailor story appeared in the daily King Features comic strip Thimble Theatre
18 Suspiria Dario Argento's psychedelic 1970s horror masterpiece makes its way to Blu-ray in the UK this week. Turn to p104 to see why we think this is one disc that cult fans definitely won't want to miss	19 Bun in the oven Records were made on this day in 1953, when 71 per cent of all TV sets in the UK were tuned in to I Love Lucy. The episode, titled 'Lucy Goes to Hospital' saw the title character give birth. Beat that, X-Factor!	20 Singing cowboys Directed by Irving Cummings and Raoul Walsh, In Old Arizona was released on this day in 1929. It's famous for being the first major western to use sound technology, as well as the first talkie to be filmed outdoors	21 Number one! Widely regarded as the first 'American' novel, William Hill Brown's The Power of Sympathy; or, The Triumph of Nature was published in Boston on this day in 17890	22 Armoured Prior to helping the next Predator flick for producer Robert Rodriguez, director Nimrod Antal made this tense armoured car heist thriller, which opens at cinemas across the UK this Friday www.armouredmovie.com		
25 Whiteout Arriving in the UK on DVD and BD today is this thriller starring Kate Beckinsale as a US Marshal investigating Antarctica's first homicide www.warnerbros.com				29 The Lovely Bones Peter Jackson's return to the director's chair gets a UK cinema release. Based on the book of the same name, The Lovely Bones centres on a young murdered girl watching her family – and killer – from heaven www.lovelybones.com		
01 The Firm Nick Love's remake of Alan Clarke's classic tale of football hooliganism in the 1980s arrives on DVD and BD in the UK this week. Anybody think Love might have scored an own-goal with this one? Watch it, he'll cut ya!	02 Integrated Systems Europe Amsterdam's RAI hosts this three-day event described as the 'undisputed number one show for professional AV and electronic systems integration'. Doors open today www.lseurope.org	03 InAVation Awards 2010 Joining the ISE event at Amsterdam's RAI this Wednesday is the latest EMEA InAVation Awards ceremony, celebrating the brightest and best professional AV projects and tech from around the World	04 Facebook The online social networking site was founded on this day in 2004. It must be a big deal, because director David Fincher is now turning the story of its creation into a movie...	05 Invictus Clint Eastwood directs this inspiring true story of Nelson Mandela's efforts to unite South Africa, and the nation's subsequent success in the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Join the scrum at UK cinemas today www.warnerbros.com		07 Happy birthday! Stand-up comedian and actor Eddie Izzard was born on this day in 1962. Lately, he's been seen playing the character Torrence in the BBC's recent high-profile two-part adaptation of the sci-fi classic The Day of the Triffids
08 Adventureland Kristen Stewart takes a break from mooning over vampires in the Twilight films to play the love interest in this coming-of-age story set in a 1980s amusement park. Pick it up on DVD and BD in the UK today		10 evenTech Scotland Now in its third year, this two-day regional trade exhibition devoted to entertainment and installation technology again takes up residence in the Grand Ballroom of the Thistle Hotel, Glasgow www.eventech-scotland.com	11 HCC #179 Start saving your pennies for HCC #179. Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands this Thursday, packed with hardware tests, installs, features, outspoken opinions and full-on software reviews			

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2000-

A Home Cinema ODYSSEY

Jim Hill recaps the technological milestones of
a rollercoaster decade of home cinema

2010

2000



→ In the first quarter of 2000, the UK buys more DVD players than in the whole of 1999. The mainstream public is still sceptical about the format, but it doesn't take long for home cinema fans to realise the superiority of DVD over VHS,

and **region-hacking your player becomes a national obsession.**

What's most surprising is that the majority of DVD players sold are PlayStation 2 games consoles. Later in the decade, this so-called PlayStation effect works wonders for Blu-ray.

→ JVC unveils D-VHS and the impressively specified HM-DR1000EK digital VHS recorder. Despite testing well in HCC's labs and being snapped up by camcorder users, the writing is already on the wall for this kind of analogue media and Sony decides against bringing its own D-VHS deck to the UK. 'We're sitting this one out,' reveals Sony's Eric Kingdon.

→ Widescreen TV sales double and overtake 4:3 sets, as DVD's letterbox and anamorphic presentations flatter the new shape. TV channels gradually switch to 16:9 broadcasts.

→ HCC runs its first ever plasma TV group test with a price range of £8,000-£10,000; TiVo lands in the UK in November to much applause; and Pioneer readies its DV-939A DVD-Audio player to tackle Sony's Super Audio CD format (see box out, p22).

2001



→ Perhaps the messiest and least conclusive of format wars – recordable DVD – kicks off with announcements from three big hitters of the home entertainment world, of three mutually-incompatible recordable DVD systems. Philips shows HCC

prototypes of its DVD+R recorder, Pioneer unveils DVD-R, while Panasonic proposes DVD-RAM, using caddy-protected discs.

Each system has inherent advantages and even HCC is unable to call a winner. Simon Heape from Toshiba points out an unexpected benefit from the stalemate. 'The recordable DVD format war is good news for DVD sales.'

→ The major talking point at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in 2001 is of high-definition TV, and Japan soon becomes the first country to broadcast an HD signal.

→ A visit to Tokyo just before Christmas, to investigate Japan's plans for recordable DVD, gives HCC a tantalising glimpse into the future. At its top-secret R&D workshop, Sony engineer **Yukinori Kawauchi shows HCC editor Steve May what looks like a DVD in a blue shell.**

It has five times the storage of DVD and will be able to record up to two hours of high-definition footage. We're calling it 'DVR-Blue' for now, says Kawauchi. Neither of them realise it yet, but it is, of course, an early Blu-ray disc.



PRECIOUS
The first *Lord of the Rings* flick hit cinemas, 2001



An excellent idea:
KEF's distinctive small-scale speakers lead the new lifestyle sub/sat market

Format War #1

Super Audio CD vs DVD Audio

While DVD revolutionised picture quality in the home, two other formats were announced that would improve audio quality. 'CD obsolete?' questioned the cover of *HCC* #55, but it was not to be. A bitter and ultimately self-destructive war between Toshiba's DVD-Audio and Sony's Super Audio CD ensured that neither would win and enter the mainstream.

Toshiba's simpler solution seemed like the natural partner for DVD, with the Toshiba SD-500E debuting at an attractive price point. Technical delays, however, allowed Sony to steal a march and wow audiophiles with the fabulous SCD-777ES on sale in time for Christmas 2001.

John Bamford, then product manager at Pioneer, summed up the situation: 'With two formats vying for consumer's attention, they're both doomed to commercial failure'. A frustrated Roger Batchelor of Denon agreed. 'DVD-Audio is shrouded in confusion, but we're bringing the player in anyway.' That's the spirit.

2002



→ Home cinema miniaturises, so too do the speakers. 'The market for sub/sat systems continues to explode,' says *HCC*. 'Their diminutive size and often easy-to-disguise sub make multichannel sound acceptable even in modest rooms.' 2002

is packed with lifestyle sub/sat packages appearing from the likes of Sony, Elac, Blueroom and KEF – and the latter's classic 'egg' speakers help define the category. No wonder it's still making them now.

→ **News of the analogue broadcast switch-off fuels iDTV sales**, especially with ITV Digital going bust in June and being replaced by Freeview in October. Panasonic and Sony begin preparing DVD recorders with Freeview tuners built-in – a whole new way of watching television is beginning.

→ Texas Instruments perfects a native 16:9 DLP chipset with 720p resolution and SIM2 is the first manufacturer to build a projector around it, in the curvaceous shape of the HT300. It flies off the shelves for £9,000.

→ LCD TVs get bigger with the Sharp Aquos LC-30HV2E LCD TV (30 inches and £6,000) and then Samsung's record-breaking LW40A13W (40 inches and £7,000). Is plasma in trouble?

2003



→ New high-def formats cause a stir at the 2003 CES, as Blu-ray, HD DVD, and Advanced Optical Disc are put on display. The latter two merge later in the year, leaving the enticing prospect of hi-def home cinema rippling through the industry... and the irritating prospect of a format war rippling through consumers. 'Blu-ray looked the best of the proposals,' enthused *HCC* Ed Steve May. 'Image definition was staggering.'

→ Pioneer extends its lead in the plasma TV race with its PDP-503HDE, the first XGA panel with 768-line resolution, winning our plasma group test in the process. Meanwhile, the corporation announces the winding down of its audio division – a brave but ultimately costly decision.

→ After some dilly-dallying, Sony finally launches an onslaught of LCD and plasma TVs. These sport its breathtaking 'floating image' design with the screens seemingly floating in glass frames. **Its failure to predict the demand for flatpanel screens has been disastrous for the TV division** – deals with Samsung have to be made to produce the sets, which are expensive and lack HDMI ports. Samsung and LG are meanwhile capitalizing on their foresight with LCD, seizing market share and continuing to muscle in on the Japanese elite.



PROTO BD
Early Blu-ray products made a show at CES, 2003

EX, ES, ETC

AVRs packed in more and more audio formats, 2004



2004



→ Having waited for half a decade, Hollywood heavyweight **George Lucas releases Star Wars on DVD. Carrie Fisher and Anthony Daniels are rolled out for the UK launch.** The fully-restored trilogy is available in 4:3 and widescreen sets and touts a THX approved soundtrack. *HCC* scribbler Anton van Beek claims the films are 'critic-proof'. Six years later, we're now awaiting the Blu-ray release of Lucas' epic saga.

→ Sony's high-end Qualia projector establishes its LCoS-based SXRD technology. It's used to show the full potential of the Japanese BDZ-S77 Blu-ray player to open-mouthed AV-fanatics at trade shows.

→ High-definition arrives in three flavours, 720p, 1080i and 1080p – only two of which are compatible with HDMI version one, which is beginning to emerge as the cable of choice for home entertainment.

→ The logos for the various Dolby and DTS audio formats are beginning to stretch all the way across the latest AV receivers as the manufacturers try to keep up. Dolby pushes the sublime to the ridiculous with the announcement of Dolby Pro-logic IIx. A spokesman from the company acknowledges the problem: 'Our fear is that all this talk of EX, 6.1, 7.1 and even 10.2 will leave people confused about our core 5.1-channel platform.' You said it, Dolby.



GEEK HEAVEN
The *Star Wars* Trilogy finally appeared on DVD, 2004

2005



→ While Toshiba and Sony fine-tune their next generation HD formats, upscaling DVD players abound, supposedly turning standard-definition films into high-def ones. Sony's Eric Kingdom is unimpressed: 'I've heard the argument that a good upscaler is as impressive. Sorry, but with good HD software, there is no contest.'

→ Home entertainment products are becoming increasingly design-led. True-to-form, Bang and Olufsen's BeoVision LCD looks stunning (when it's switched off), but Samsung, LG and Toshiba's previously dowdy electronics are also becoming conspicuously stylish. Simon Heape of Toshiba explains the trend: 'Customers are realizing that even large TVs, if well-designed, can fit comfortably into the living room.'

→ Hitachi and Fujitsu show off their HD plasma screens boasting 1080i resolution. Pioneer, though, steals the thunder with the PDP-5000EX, its first genuine 1080p panel. **Pioneer's gamble on plasma seems to be paying off**, as there's now a yawning gap between itself and the rest of the field.

Top Five Discs of the Decade...

The software releases that got out blood pumping in the Noughties...



The Lord of the Rings: The Motion Picture Trilogy → Special Extended R2 DVD Edition
Peter Jackson's trilogy makes for spectacular viewing on DVD.

Alien Quadrilogy → R2 DVD
An exhaustive nine-disc set from 20th Century Fox.

Jurassic Park → Superbit R2 DVD
This Japanese DVD boasted the same pulse-pounding DTS 5.1 mix as the R1 DVD as well as improved image quality.

Blade Runner: Ultimate Collector's Ed. → All-region BD
Five-disc US-import in briefcase-style packaging.

The Ultimate Matrix Collection → All-region BD
The defining sci-fi franchise of the decade became a genuine must-have Blu-ray with this feature-packed six-disc US boxset.



HIGH-DEF
Pioneer demo'd the first ever 1080p TV, 2005

2006



→ Microsoft's Xbox 360 launches in the UK, signalling the beginning of hi-def home cinema gaming. *Perfect Dark Zero* and other launch titles are an immediate hit, but in HCC's test labs, the hardware is found severely lacking, with no digital audio or HDMI ports, intolerable fan noise, no DVD playback and a tendency to catch fire.

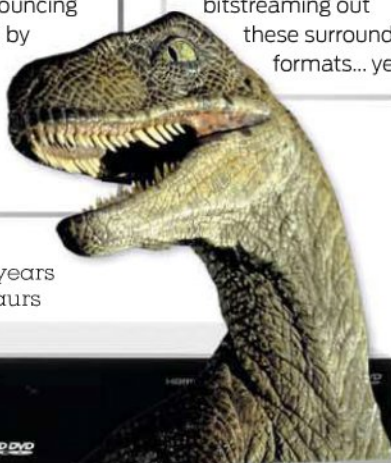
Meanwhile, Sony's expensive PlayStation 3 is selling more slowly than anticipated – even in its native Japan – and is criticized for a lack of software support when it launches in the US. A shortage of parts knocks the UK on sale date back to March 2007 and the price on arrival is more than £500. Our sample, imported from the US, reveals a machine way ahead of its time, packing HDMI v1.3, WiFi, Bluetooth and even SACD compatibility. Crucially, it's also a Blu-ray player in disguise.

→ **Toshiba's HD-AX1 launches HD DVD in the UK, going head-to-head with Sony and Samsung BD players.** HCC's double cover run for #127 gives the formats equal billing. As for which is best, it's a close call, with pros and cons on either side, and opinion amongst the HCC team divided down the middle. Blu-ray offers up to 50GB of storage on a disc, but predictably, it's strangled by region-coding and is significantly more expensive to produce, while Toshiba's HD-DVD offers the same picture quality without the restrictions.

→ Sony revamps its TV range with its Bravia brand, backed by a multi-million dollar TV ad campaign featuring coloured balls bouncing down a hill. The fanfare is supported by some decent TVs.

→ Sky HD arrives, although buyers are forced to wait for the company to fill all its set-top box orders. D'oh!

Beaten: HD DVD lasted under two years before it went the way of the dinosaurs



2007



→ With all the investment in hi-def TVs and home cinema, PC companies start looking to the living room for a piece of the home entertainment pie, and Media Centre PCs appear in all shapes and sizes.

Sony shows its circular Vaio TPI media centre; HP has Media Smart server; (the first to use MS Home Office Server OS); and Evesham launches the compact Vista Mini PC. Even Apple's Mac Mini, with its slick Front Row media player, is moved into the living room. A combination of fan noise, shonky build quality and a reliance on Windows ensures that only the anoraks give up their DVD decks.

→ Philips dazzles press and punters alike at Berlin's IFA show when it launches the first Aurea TVs. Even so, a year later the brand pulls out of the North American flatscreen market.

→ **DVD's tenth birthday is marked by sales that remain strong** despite the growing popularity of Blu-ray and digital downloads. The dream appears to be over for Super Audio CD, though, as the new iteration of the PlayStation 3 quietly dumps support for the hi-res music format.

→ Onkyo releases the TX-SR875, the first receiver with built-in Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio decoders. Shame there aren't any HD-disc spinners capable of bitstreaming out these surround formats... yet.

Format War #2



Blu-ray vs HD DVD

When Apple's support for Blu-ray failed to materialise and Microsoft's add-on HD DVD player for Xbox 360 made no real impact, it became clear that the Blu-ray vs HD DVD battle would be won or lost in Hollywood. The studios loved the impenetrable copy protection of both HD discs and, were ready to wade in, but on which side?

Sony bought MGM studios the year before Blu-ray's launch, helping to skew the vote, but when Paramount released the Summer's biggest blockbuster, *Transformers*, on HD DVD, things looked bleak in the Blu-ray camp.

2008 began with both camps still battling, but Warner's surprise decision, announced January 4, to go Blu-ray-exclusive meant the HD DVD strategy collapsed like a pack of cards. On February 19, Toshiba announced it was discontinuing development, marketing and manufacturing of its HD DVD decks and the hi-def format war was over!



GLOWING
Philips innovative Aurea TV lit up its LCD range, 2007



DEBUT
Samsung's BD-P1000 was the first BD deck to hit UK stores, 2006

2008



→ This was the year that OLED arrived, a whole-new TV technology that some futurologists predict will make both plasma and LCD redundant. OLED screens are brighter, thinner, with higher resolution and are far more energy efficient.

Sony's XEL-1 only has an 11in screen, but its 3mm depth and blistering picture wows crowds at CES. At £3.5K, though, it's an expensive technology, and its viability seems uncertain when Sony wheels out the same product at the following year's show.

→ Blu-ray finally realises its interactive potential with the adoption of Profile 2.0, which allows the BD-Live content on discs to be accessed via an Ethernet port on the players. **But what about all the profile 1.1 and 1.0 machines** out there? HCC describes those decks as 'obsolete.' Panasonic launches the UK's first 'final profile' machine and confirms that yes, everything before it is incompatible with BD-Live and not upgradeable – except for the PS3, of course.

→ Virgin Media announces it will offer BBC iPlayer functionality on its standard V Box and V+ HD PVR. The VOD service is already a big hit online, but broadband providers complain it is sapping bandwidth.

2009



→ LED TV becomes the new flatscreen buzzword, with Samsung and Sony in particular using edge-mounted diodes to create ever-thinner TVs. It looks like it could be over for OLED before it's even started.

→ Do not adjust your set. The Philips Cinema 21:9 TV stretches the aspect ratio to suit the letterbox presentation of Blu-ray discs. At £4,500, it doesn't exactly fly off the shelves, but HCC's six-page review reveals a set with huge potential. Is this the shape of things to come?

→ Internet on your TV is the must-have feature of 2009.

Samsung leads the way with its TV widgets, bite-sized pieces of web content from YouTube, Flickr, etc, that appear in boxes beside the picture. An exclusivity deal with Yahoo! ensures a head start, but Sony's AppliCast, Panasonic's Viera Cast and Philips' Net TV follow. Toshiba's cutting-edge Cell TV is demo'd with widgets, wireless HDMI and powerful processing.

→ It's all prototypes for now, but Panasonic's 3D Blu-ray demo on a 103in plasma TV gives punters a taste of the future. Meanwhile, cinema chains get behind 3D, clearly seeing it as a way to stay ahead of piracy and recruit new audiences. The 3D versions of *Up* and *Ice Age 3* draw more crowds than the 2D versions.

The decade ends with the 3D epic *Avatar* cleaning up at the box office ●

And the future?

Futurologist Dr Ian Pearson looks ahead...

'Already we're seeing talk of 3D. We're seeing talk of where does it go next, we're seeing talk of 3D displays. We want fully immersive stuff. And today's screens, no matter what inches they are, they're not fully immersive. I can't wait for the next generation – video visors.'



'You put this visor on, and it's got this full wrap-around screen, which is not the equivalent of a 40, 50, 60in display, but is completely wrap-around – as far as your retinas can cope.'

'Even that though, in five years time, will not be the end of the road. What we're really heading towards is an age of digital jewellery. All the technology you own will continue to miniaturise until it's in a piece of jewellery.'

'In 2020, you will not have a display in your living room, you'll have two active contact lenses in your eyes, directly beaming lasers straight onto your retina, using tiny micro-mirrors. And it'll be fully wrap-around. Everywhere your eyes look, you'll see the image appropriate to that direction.'

'And after that is active skin...'



OLED TV
Sony's 3mm thick 11in screen retailed for £3,500, 2008



SIZE 'O'
Super-slim TVs like Samsung's Series 8 models sold like hot cakes, 2009

CATCH UP
BBC's iPlayer service arrived on Virgin Media, 2008



Home
Cinema
Heroes
No. 29



Mark Craven
salutes 20 years of
Denzel Washington

Solid as a rock

Blown away:
Déjà Vu was
filmed in post-
Hurricane Katrina
New Orleans



We're used to our favourite movie stars making atrocious films every now and then – even Sir Ben Kingsley has both the sublime, Oscar-winning *Ghandi* and, ahem, *Bloodrayne* on his CV. Yet trawl through the 21-year acting career of Denzel Washington and it's hard to find any real stinkers.

One reason, of course, is that he never moves far out of his comfort zone; you've never seen Denzel in outer space, or in a rom-com, or in a rubber suit playing a superhero. You've seen him play a lot of cops, though. And soldiers, sailors, FBI agents and ATF officers. Not that this is a problem – cinema needs its badge-toting, gun-wielding hardmen as much as it needs its caped crusaders.

Another reason why it's hard to think of a bad Denzel movie is that he's simply a very believable actor. As a frequent collaborator – Tony Scott – said during the promotional interviews for their latest outing *Taking of Pelham 1 2 3* (see page 102 for our verdict on the Blu-ray): 'He always delivers.' And it's true. Pop pretty much any

Washington flick from *Cry Freedom* to *The Bone Collector* into your disc player and you'll witness an acting masterclass.

From a home cinema perspective, his output is getting better as he gets older. While earlier movies like *Malcolm X*, *Devil in a Blue Dress* and *Glory* are essential viewing for any film fan, there's a run of flicks from the Noughties that are crying out for a big screen, big speakers and a big tweak on your AVR's volume control. These include *Man on Fire* and its blistering action set-pieces; *Déjà Vu*, with its explosive audio mix and unique take on the Hollywood car chase; *American Gangster* and its epic, urban sprawl. Anything made by one of the Scott brothers, basically.

Kung fu king

This run of form looks set to continue with Washington's newest film, *The Book of Eli*. Out now in multiplexes, the post-apocalyptic actioner casts Denzel as a man wandering the US desert, protecting a mysterious book that will save mankind. He does this by waving a sword about, firing rocket launchers and karate-kicking bad guys. It could be one of the first must-have Blu-rays of 2010 ●

Quintessential Washington... Denzel deals out justice in *Man on Fire*



1 Let the right one in

Creasy, a model of politeness, borrows an old couples' flat for a spot of R&R



2 Rocket Man

Always prepared, he unpacks a rocket launcher and sets up camp next to the window...



3 Boom!

...giving him a perfect shot at the convoy of corrupt cops driving through the neighbourhood



4 Takeaway

Back on the street, Creasy grabs one of the surviving cops and takes him away for a nice, friendly chat...

Must own...



Glory

Sony Pictures → All-region BD £20 Approx

Washington cemented his position in Tinseltown with an Oscar-winning portrayal of an ex-slave turned Union soldier in the US Civil War. Sony Pictures' BD does wonders for a film of its vintage, director Ed Zwick hasn't made a better film since, and Denzel's performance lives long in the memory. **97.41:** 'Give 'em hell, 54th!'

The Union's first black regiment prepares to storm the Confederate stronghold at Fort Wagner. They're all going to die, aren't they?



Man on Fire

20th Century Fox → All-region BD £23 Approx

'Creasy's art is death – and he's about to paint his masterpiece.' With dialogue like this, you can't take *Man on Fire* too seriously, but in Tony Scott's violent, uber-stylised revenge actioner, Denzel's star turn as ex-CIA killing machine John Creasy ain't to be laughed at. If you don't own this flick on Blu-ray, then we're ashamed of you. **93.24:** Creasy's hunt for the bad guys leads him to a rave. The soundtrack booms, the camera work is frenetic and Denzel sets the place on fire. Brutal!



Inside Man

Universal Pictures → All-region BD £20 Approx

When Spike Lee made his first proper studio movie, it's not surprising he called upon frequent collaborator Washington to take one of the lead roles. As heist movies go, it's one of the best, and rumours of a sequel (a first for both Lee and Washington) continue. **03.58:** 'Perfectly Planned Painting. We never leave until the job is done.'

The slogan on the robbers' van gives the audience a clue to this howdunnit even while the opening credits are rolling.



Déjà Vu

Walt Disney HE → Region B BD £28 Approx

From the opening boat-exploding set piece, *Déjà Vu* is pure popcorn cinema, with Denzel's ATF agent going back in time to stop a terrorist doing, erm, what he's already done. Despite its sci-fi plotting, it succeeds in delivering gritty action thrills at a relentless pace. **100.29:** Denzel steals the 'time-viewing' truck to follow the terrorist's vehicle – in the past. It's enough to make your head hurt, but the quick editing and rampaging soundmix works as AV paracetamol.

Worth seeing...



American Gangster

Universal Pictures → All-region BD £20 Approx

Washington teamed up with Hollywood heavyweights Russell Crowe and Ridley Scott for this lovingly-researched, '70s set crime thriller. Our Home Cinema Hero absolutely nails the role of the ruthless Harlem heroin kingpin, Frank Lucas, whose entire empire crumbles because of a chinchilla coat...

138.44: Lucas is caught by Russell Crowe's dogmatic cop, finally bringing the two actors together on camera for this 10-minute interview scene.



The Bone Collector

Sony Pictures → All-region BD £20 Approx

Denzel may have thought he'd landed a franchise when he took on the role of crippled forensics expert Lincoln Rhyme – author Jeffrey Deaver has so far written eight novels in the series. No sequels arose, but even as a standalone thriller *The Bone Collector* has a lot to offer – gruesome murders, a gripping plot, and a young Angelina Jolie. **109.11:** The quadriplegic Rhyme uses all his ingenuity, and teeth, to fight off the serial killer in the film's gory finale.



Crimson Tide

Walt Disney HE → Region B BD £24 Approx

Yet another Tony Scott/Washington double act, *Crimson Tide* is an old-fashioned submarine yarn with Washington's junior officer committing mutiny to stop Gene Hackman's hawkish commander from starting a nuclear war. Tense, fast-paced and produced by Jerry Bruckheimer, it marks the beginning of Denzel's action-oriented career. **24.55:** Even a small onboard fire in the submarine is an excuse to bring the surrounds and LFE channel to life. But that's Bruckheimer for you!



Philadelphia

Sony Pictures → R2 Collector's Ed DVD → £13 Approx

Don't get us wrong – Denzel's performance as an ambulance-chasing lawyer in *Philadelphia* is solid, and the film itself isn't an absolute stinker. It's just that Jonathan Demme's AIDS-tackling drama seems to have been created solely with the intention of winning Oscars (which it did), and manipulating the feelings of its audience. **21.41:** 'I have AIDS.' Tom Hank's frank admission is enough to get Denzel retreating behind his desk.



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INSTALLS

→ **Smarthome highlights** **STEALTH ACOUSTICS** You can't see sound, so why see the speakers? **DEFINITIVE TECHNOLOGY** Ultra-thin on-wall speakers make their UK debut **RUNCO** LightStyle DLP projectors **XANTECH** Updated keypad controllers for Digi-5 multiroom **CERTIFIED AV-HOLIC!** Two *HCC* readers guide you through their home theatre setups

Drive-in cinema

Think garages are just for storing cars?
Turn to p36 to see how one was
transformed into this spectacular cinema



Invisible surround sound

You can't see sound, so why do you need to see your loudspeakers?

Home cinema installations come in many shapes and sizes, but if you integrate your kit into your surroundings, your friends and family need never know you boast a seriously sexy Odeon-at-home. This 'invisible' approach is ideal if space is at a premium, or if you prefer to hide your light under a bushel.

The US-based Stealth Acoustics is one company at the forefront of invisible audio solutions with 36 years experience in producing uncompromising sound that's hidden from view. Most in-wall speakers leave grilles on show, thus compromising room aesthetics, and, while invisible speaker solutions have been around a while, some compromise performance for looks. Stealth's solutions aim to offer good value to installers and consumers, while retaining sound integrity.

Fully-fledged install

Distributed in the UK by custom install expert Habitech (www.habitech.co.uk), Stealth uses a three-layer composite material for the faces of its speaker panels made up of two layers of high-grade graphics paper with a foam centre. The speaker face is fixed flush with your wall, and finished with plaster, before being painted to match the room. The speaker's front panel is isolated from the surrounding wall to prevent cracking.

There are four speakers in the Stealth range, plus a subwoofer. The full-range flagship AX3 is a three-way system using a trio of high-power neodymium motors and a high-power 8in woofer, which fires into an airtight container to create an 'Acoustic Lever', activating the 16 x 30in panel for low frequencies. The result is a well balanced, expressive system with decent low-range, crisp high frequency response and a midrange with



Hidden talents: Stealth Acoustics provides a 'place-saver' panel which is installed when the wall is constructed so that speakers aren't damaged during the build. Once the place saver is removed (left) the speaker can be installed, plastered over and decorated



Sleek living: Invisible speaker installations are perfect for homes with a minimalist design

a penetrating punch. The FX8 (two-way 8in), and FX6 (two-way 6in) speakers can be used for rear channels, or fronts in a more modest system. The STX8 is a single-panel stereo system, with the same footprint as the FX8, but with two channels, isolated with separate heavy-duty crossovers.

Finally, for that all-important grunt, the B1630 two-panel, 2 x 8in woofer invisible subwoofer system uses Stealth's Lever Acoustic technology to create bass up to 160Hz. Designed to work in pairs, the panels can be mounted adjacently, staked or split. A companion 255R subwoofer amplifier sits in your kit rack and provides 250W of power.

So unless you like to show off your 'black boxes', why not consider invisible speakers to match your in-ceiling projector and drop-down screen? Sometimes it's better to be heard and not seen!

Digi keypads take on multi-room



Xantech has boosted its Digi-5 range of multi-room products with a new, UK-style, keypad. UK

distributor AWE ensures that installers are kept well stocked with Xantech DSSH4 and D5RHK multi-room audio systems, and the products will benefit from the new keypads. 'The new keypads optimise the already excellent Digi-5 system for UK custom installers,' explains Stuart Tickle, managing director of AWE. The Xantech multi-room systems can control up to four sources and distribute audio in up to four zones.

Beyond the mythology



Definitive Technology has introduced its Mythos XTR-50 to the UK. An ultra-thin (1.5in) on-wall,

on-shelf loudspeaker, the XTR-50 claims to deliver a performance unseen in regular shallow enclosures. Designed for super-thin LED screens, it aims to combine a thin profile with the bass and dynamic range of fat-boy models, thanks to its XTDD technology driver. To extend and deepen the bass the XTDD drivers are pressure-coupled to four dome low-bass radiators, while the tweeter is the one also used in the award-winning Mythos ST SuperTow.

CA's perfect FIT



Current Audio's pivoting woofer speakers aim to add sound quality to in-ceiling

installations. Three 6.5in models in the brand's in-ceiling range feature its pivoting focussed image technology (FIT), which uses a woofer with 50 degrees of adjustability. The top-of-the-line FIT654 boasts a woven carbon fibre cone; other options include materials such as aluminium, injection-moulded carbon fibre and the exclusive 'Meta-Plex'.

All Current Audio FIT speakers offer an 'installation handle', for easier installs, and FastLock grilles.

Runco shine light



Runco has just announced its DLP LightStyle series. The LS-3, LS-5 and LS-7 models are available

from its UK distributor, Pulse Marketing. The trio boast oversized optics for superior image uniformity and clarity, a low noise and light pollution cabinet, built-in sound dampeners and side vents to direct ventilation from users. Image features include frame-by-frame black level adjustment; adaptive contrast; and BrilliantColor for increased colour brightness. The lens is made from precision-ground optics in two options: standard (1.85:1-2.40:1), and short throw option (1.56:1-1.86:1).



Max Payne Motion Picture © 2008 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

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Poolside frolics

Garage conversions are rarely this exciting, says **Anton van Beek**

Kit Checklist

Screen Research: 8ft electric projector screen
Runco: Reflection RS-900 projector
Future Automation: In-ceiling projector lift
Pioneer: PDP-LX6090 60in Full HD Kuro plasma
Bowers and Wilkins: 7x Signature 8NT in-wall speakers
Sunfire: 2x HRS-10 1000W subwoofers
Kaleidescape: 1080p Mini Player (connected to a Mini System in the main house)
Pioneer: BDP LX-71 Blu-ray player
Arcam: FMJ AV9 THX Ultra2 preamp processor
Arcam: FMJ P7 power amplifier
Sony: PlayStation3 console
Microsoft: Xbox 360 console
Nintendo: Wii console
Sonos: ZonePlayer90
Philips: Pronto TSU9800 touchscreen remote
Philips: Pronto RFX9600 serial extender
Rako: Lighting control
BPT: Intercom and gate access
iPort: In-wall iPod dock
Wireless access point
Access to another Pioneer BDP-LX71 and 4x Sky+ HD set-top boxes in the kit rack in the main house



The out-building housing the cinema and games-bar area was originally a large garage



The cinema features both a drop-down 8-foot projector screen (pictured) and a 60in Pioneer plasma TV

It was designed to work as a 'multifunctional environment where family and friends can interact, watch films or play games together,' and this pro-install certainly lives up to its billing.

Combining a high-quality cinema environment (the owners are keen film-goers) and a 'social' area featuring a pool table and fully-stocked bar, it's enough to make any AV-phile turn green with envy. Well, it certainly had that effect on us.

Divide and conquer

'The segmentation was done discretely using the cinema seats and lighting,' says Finite Solutions' project manager Ciaran Richardson. 'This meant we were able to use different lighting to open or close portions of the room. So people could be in the bar area and still interact with people in the cinema portion of the room.' Just as long as they don't talk on their mobile phones during the movie...

With the layout of the room established, it was time to start spec'ing kit for the cinema. And, from the Pioneer Blu-ray player and 60in Kuro plasma to the Runco projector and 7.2-channel audio system, we reckon the owner has got a setup to savour.

However, it's the Kaleidescape movie server that has proven to be the star of the show. 'They love it!' claims Richardson. 'When we first installed the system we gave the owner a quick demonstration on how to import DVDs. When we returned the following Monday morning to continue with the install, he'd already uploaded all 190 DVDs in his collection and was giving a friend a tour of the room.'

That's hardly surprising. If we had this AV palace at home, we'd be showing it off to everyone, too.

38 INSTALL

A Family fun

With its cinema, pool table and bar, it's no wonder this made-over garage has now superseded the living room as the space where the owner's family spend most of their time

B Surrounded by sound

Three front-mounted Bowers and Wilkins Signature 8NT in-wall speakers, and a further four built into the ceiling, provide seven channels of surround audio

C Heavy lifting

Installing the projector lift wasn't without problems. 'The ceiling was very uneven, not even a magician could fix it,' explains the installer. The solution was to fit and plaster a brand-new ceiling

D Powerhouse pair

The Arcam P7 amplifier delivers 150W of grunt per-channel; processing is handled by the Arcam AV9 pre-amp that sits above in the rack

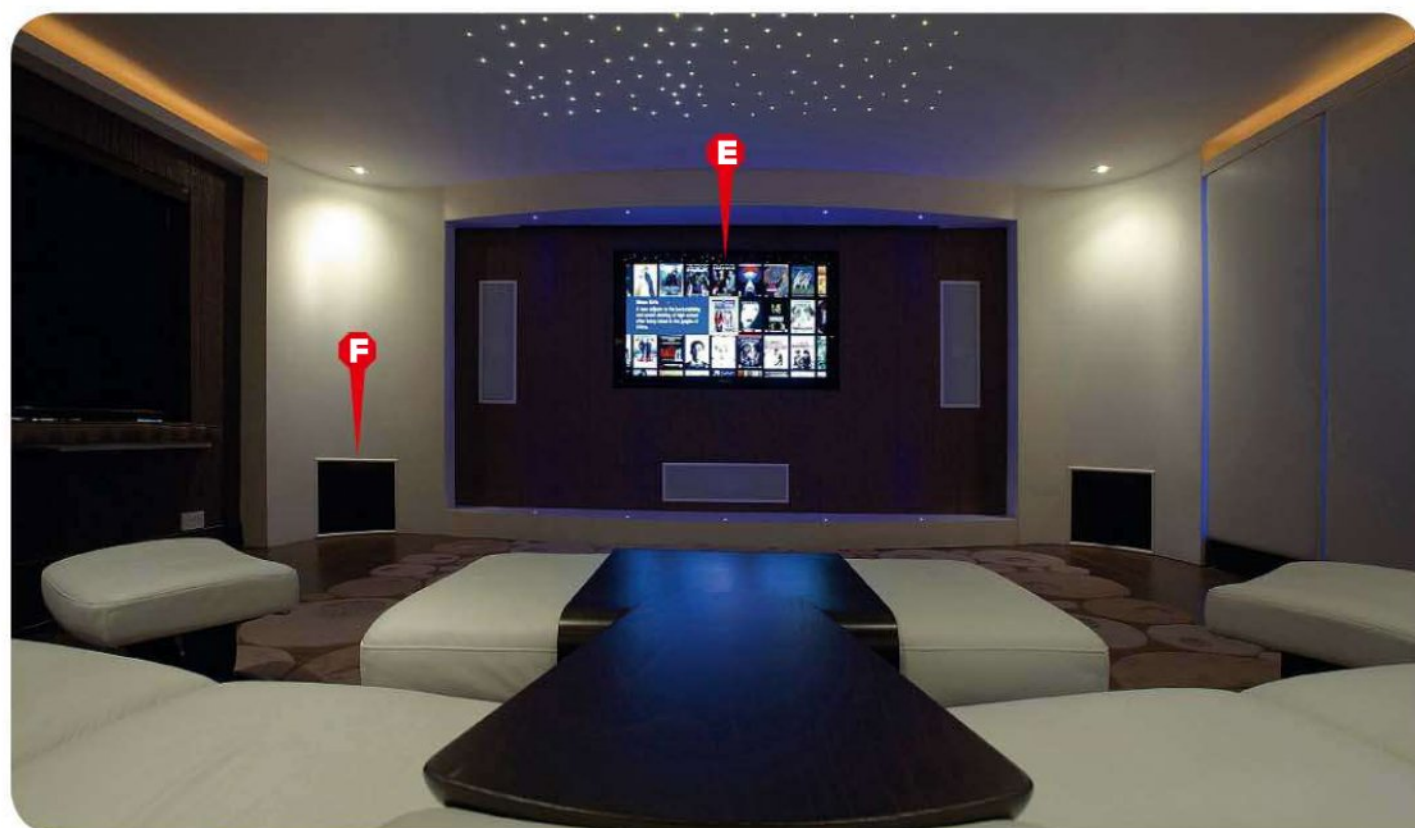
E TV addict

If the owner doesn't fancy a big cinematic experience, he can leave the projector screen up and stick with the 60in plasma instead

F Twice as nice

Why settle for just one subwoofer? This pro-install utilises two Sunfire 1000W subs to guarantee truly dynamic bass action

Finishing touch: The various forms of lighting (including an LED starscape on the ceiling) give the cinema a luxury feel





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Certified: AV-holic!

Every issue, **HCC readers** invite you to take a tour of their beloved home cinema setups...



Branching out: AV-holic Mark has set up a home improvement firm called MDB Homeworks (see www.mdbhomeworks.moonfruit.com for more info)

Introduce yourself...

My name's Mark Bott, I'm 35 and I'm a self-employed office partitioner. I've been reading your magazine for a long time and I have now completed my cinema room.

When did you become an AV-holic?

I've been hooked ever since I connected up my VHS player to an amp. I'm a big collector of DVDs, Blu-rays and HD DVDs. I have about 3,000 discs at the moment and over 170 of them are BD. I try and buy the Collector's Editions as much as possible.

Your room looks great. What hardware have you fitted?

An InFocus IN81 projector and Grandview electric 100in projection screen, plus a 52in Samsung Series 7 LCD TV, Onkyo TX-NR905 amp, Samsung BD deck, Sky+HD, Denon multiregion DVD spinner, Xbox 360 with HD DVD player, PlayStation 3, and Nintendo Wii. Surround sound comes courtesy

of Mission M53s, M5c and an M5AS subwoofer, plus Mordaunt Short rears. I've also got an Acer Aspire laptop with a Blu-ray drive, a Harmony 1000 remote and the B&W Zeppelin iPod dock.

What's next on your AV shopping list?

Speakers. I have been looking at Mission's 79 series. I think they'll team up well with the Onkyo 905. Also on my list is Acoustic Energy's Radiance system, because it would match the quality and look of my room.

How much have you spent on your hobby?

Probably over £15K on AV equipment over the years.

Are you excited by 3D?

Well, I went to the Gadget Show last year and played my first 3D game – I have to say I was very impressed. As long as they get it right – comfortable glasses or, even better, no glasses at all – I think it will be very big. But I don't think it will take over in 2010.

Room essentials

A Behind the scenes

When the projection system is not in use, this 52in Samsung TV takes care of video duties

B Extra terrestrial

No home cinema is complete without an *Alien* skull!

C On a mission

These Mission M53 floorstanders use twin 6in bass drivers flanking a 1in tweeter. They may soon be replaced in this room by Mission's own 79 series speakers, or Acoustic Energy's Radiance models

D DIY dream

AV-holic Mark designed his neat-looking and fully sound-proofed cinema room from scratch

E A grand view

An InFocus IN81 projector fires at a 100in projection screen, making the most of our AV-holic's multiple HD sources





Really early adopter:

Daniel's father was one of the first people in the UK to own a video recorder

Introduce yourself...

Daniel Engler.

Are you an AV-holic?

Yes. My interest began back when I was 12 or 13 – when my father was one of 2,000 people in the UK to buy the first Philips video recorder. He bought it from Tottenham Court Road, London. Things have now come full-circle as I have done the same, sourcing my Samsung 55in LED screen, a Pioneer LX91 BD deck and SC-LX81 amp from there, too. These replace my old Pioneer third-generation 43in plasma, Denon DVD-A1 and Denon AVC-AISR amp, which I've had for seven years.

What else is in your system?

I have a 7.1 speaker setup – the ones I originally bought to use with my old Denon amp. Bowers & Wilkins CDMINTs for the fronts, a CDMCNT for the centre, 601 S3s for the rears and 600 S3s for the surrounds. The sub is a 1,000W ASW CDM. They're all connected with QED silver speaker wire. Finishing this off is a Sony Playstation 3, a Nintendo Wii and Sky HD.

How much have you spent on your hobby over the years?

First time around, probably £10,000 including speakers. This time around £5,000, proving that technology prices do fall over time! Seven years ago, the Pioneer TV cost £4,500 alone.

What do your friends think of your setup?

They are a bit blown away and thought the 43in screen was big,

so I will have to wait to see what they think of the Samsung. My wife is quite understanding. We made a deal – she could decide how the rest of the house looked as long as I could have all seven speakers out in the front room.

And what's next?

I may get the Samsung wireless dongle for the TV and an N-speed router to stream content from my PC to the telly. It will also allow me to play Region 1 DVDs via my PC wirelessly. The Pioneer Blu-ray player only spins Region 2.

What's your current fave disc?

Transformers on Blu-ray was very impressive, as was *Gladiator*. I think your review of *Gladiator* was spot on regarding some of the scenes and how they played. I think *Transformers* edges it overall, though, as pure eye-candy – can't wait to get my hands on the second one.

Are you excited about 3D?

I am excited by 3D, although I think it will remain a niche market ●

Room essentials

A Firm favourite

Another AV-holic with a mammoth Samsung HD screen – Daniel has gone for one of its LED-lit models

B Still in use

Daniel thought he might need new speakers when he stepped up to hi-def sound, but stuck with his B&W system: 'I am more than happy with the results – in fact, the sound is amazing now'.

C Double delight

Pioneer's SC-LX81 amplifier and BDP-LX91 Blu-ray deck make a killer hi-def combo

D Fast and furious?

The home cinema system isn't our AV-holic's only pride and joy – there's this Ford GT. But is it an original or a replica?



Join the club

Do you want to see your home cinema system featured in the pages of *Home Cinema Choice*? If so, log on to www.homecinemachoice.com/avholic where you'll find all the information you need.



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REVIEWS

→ **Hardware highlights** DENON An exclusive first test of its flagship DVD-A/UD universal player FOCAL Spherical 5.1 sub/sat system LG LED-lit 46in TV & designer 2.1 Blu-ray solution TOSHIBA 55in LCD TV & second-gen XDE DVD deck AUDIOCONTROL US-built 7.1-channel receiver for the custom-install market MEGATEST 50/52in flatscreens AND MORE!

Budget brilliance

Retailing for around £350, Sony's 7.1-channel STR-DH800 is something of an AV bargain. Turn to page 58 to find out why



HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

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Universal soldier

The best things in life are not free, says **Richard Stevenson** – or easy to set up. But if you can clamber over those hurdles, the disc world is yours...

Denon's flagship player will spin almost every disc format you can think of



Cast your mind back to the cult movie *This Is Spinal Tap* and the oft-quoted line about the band's Marshall amplifier that 'goes to 11'. It's simply one better, one louder, than everyone else's amps that only go to 10. In review terms and HCC star ratings, the Denon DVD-A1UD goes to 6.

And the first few hours with the DVD-A1UD filled me with

tears. Tears of anguish. Firstly, because it is ridiculously complex to set up, particularly if you are trying to navigate Denon system-specific features such as HDMI-sync jitter reduction over a network cable using DenonLink 4th Edition. Ouch. Secondly, because I have only just purchased and installed the awesome Sony BDP-S5000ES and the Denon dismisses it in almost

every respect. That really hurts. And lastly, because I would give up eating to afford the DVD-A1UD and, as it bears a price tag of four and a half thousand quid, it means I am going to be really, really hungry by Christmas 2010. Sob, sniffle, blub.

Hell's popcorn! £4,500! When there are big-brand Profile 2.0 Blu-ray players out there for less than £200, that seems like a huge chunk of money. But compare a new 1.0 litre Kia Picanto at £6,000 to a Porsche 911 GT2 at £135,000 – it's the same price ratio and same performance ratio too. For **Denon's DVD-A1UD is**

comfortably the best universal disc-player ever made.

Yes, it is one of only a few BD-based universal players ever made, but it is at the top of the game with every type of disc you put in it.

Not only is its Blu-ray video performance even smoother and richer than the reference Pioneer BDP-LX91, it upscales DVDs with close-to-HD quality perfection and plays music on CD, SACD and DVD-A with a virtuoso hand capable of embarrassing quite a few hi-fi exotica CD-players at multiples of the price. Its upgradeable architecture and Profile 2.0 credentials means it will be riding the crest of the technology curve perhaps until we give up disc formats altogether. And it's built to last a lifetime, or perhaps two. I am a reviewer in luuurve.

Impressive at weigh in

Weighing in heavier than many AV amplifiers, the A1UD is built on a triple-layer steel base-plate with an enormous power supply transformer positioned over one of the feet for the greatest stability. The internals are divided into seven separate blocks to eliminate any potential cross-talk or interference between analogue, digital, audio and video signals.

Middle-front of the chunky fascia is the classy disc mechanism, the latest generation of Denon's SVH (Suppress Vibration Hybrid) drive. The slim metal drawer glides out with a slick authority and draws your disc back in to the mechanism's hermetically-sealed die-cast zinc housing.

Among the many features, the A1UD offers an innovative Restorer function for compressed audio. It's not in itself revolutionary, as many AV amps offer this for MP3/AAC music, >

→ Specifications

Video upscaling: YES to 1080p
Multi region: NO Region B (Blu-ray), R2 (DVD)
HDMI: YES v1.3 – and there's two of them
Component: YES 1 output
Multichannel phono: YES
Digital audio: YES optical, electrical, HDMI and DL4
SACD/DVD-A: YES/YES brilliantly, too
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: YES/YES
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES
Dimensions: 434(w) x 161(H) x 410(d)mm
Weight: 19kg
Features: BD Live; Bonusview; AVCHD playback; DivX compatible; DenonLink 4th Edition; 32-bit/192kHz DACs; Multi-layer construction; XLR stereo output; JPEG, AVI, WMA, & MP3 playback via SD card



The A1UD's secondary HDMI output allows audio and video signals to be sent separately



but the Denon takes this a step further and has a multichannel Restorer function. This aims to elevate compressed Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks to near TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio quality. Think of it as an audio upscaler for all your DVDs. While I don't usually hold much truck with audio jiggery-pokery of this ilk, the Restorer added a greater clarity and sparkle to the sound of almost every DVD I tried.

In fact, it is audio performance generally where the Denon bounds ahead of other universal players on the market. Packed full of die-hard audiophile grade components and offering such delights as 32bit/192kHz DACs and Denon's AL32 processing, this player sounds great. The only head-scratching comes with trying to decide the best way to get your audio out of the beast – over jitter-reduced HDMI, over Cat5/6 cable with DenonLink 4th edition, by full 7.1 channel analogue phono, optical or coaxial S/PDIF or the A1UD's fully-balanced XLR stereo outputs. Phew. After much faffing around with cables and connections, I opted for DenonLink to my AVP-A1HD for most video discs and switched to the stunning balanced XLR outputs for CD playback.

And then there is the Denon's video abilities, which could easily make a whole review in themselves. Based on Silicon Optix's flagship HQV Realta processor, the Denon can handle the most intense BD-Live PIP applications while outputting over

AV/CV

Product:
Flagship
universal disc
spinner

Positioning:
At the top of
Denon's Blu-ray
ladder

Peers:
Marantz
UD9004;
Pioneer
BDP-LX91;
Sony BDP-
S5000ES

twain HDMI and component video simultaneously.

The 1080p24 output is seamlessly smooth and if you want to go large with Cinemascope (2.35:1 ratio) films there is a v.stretch mode for use with anamorphic lenses or Philips' new 21:9 ratio screens. If you are really looking to eke out the very best from your Blu-rays, you can send video-only over one HDMI output straight to the projector or TV, and use the other output purely for audio direct to the amp.

The result is awesome home cinema. A romp through *Hot Fuzz* on Blu-ray reveals the Denon's true mettle with stunning clarity, rich colours and deep, deep blacks. The picture falls shy of the sheer vibrancy of the Pioneer BDP-LX92, but is arguably more natural and realistic.

The fleshpots of Denon

Flesh tones are the best I have seen on any player to date. The opening scene, where various high-level Metropolitan police are telling Nicholas Angel (Simon Pegg) he is being promoted and transferred to the country, is incredibly life-like. You feel you are right there sitting at the table, with every character's facial line, pock-mark and skin pore etched in the finest detail. And with Bill Nighy's craggy features, that's a whole lot of detail. The actor's faint sheen of sweat under the set lights is clear, their minimal make-up is obvious and the very texture of the skin has a tangible, um, skin-like quality.

While their uniforms are inky-black there is no shortage of shadow detail in the folds and creases of the fabric. With all video parameters set to default I found the picture just a little too dark with the iris on my DLP projector clamped down hard (default settings were almost perfect on a Samsung LED TV) but the Denon's comprehensive Gamma adjustment allows a fabulous measure of fine tuning.

Cut to the fast-moving scene where Sergeant Angel chases a purple-clad hoodie and the Denon does not let up. The scenery flows past with silky ease, interestingly adding a greater level of natural blur to the background (juddery pans are actually easier for the eye to focus on specific details). The purple of the yooof's jacket never loses its silky texture even as the chase unfolds in high-speed running and piston-like arm movements. **The Denon's HD picture performance with Blu-ray is state-of-the-art, no question.**

Scaling new heights

I am used to the obvious drop in clarity when looking at upscaled DVDs, of course, but within seconds of slipping in the tortuous DVD of *Ice Age*, I had to double-check I hadn't put the Blu-ray disc in by accident. The scaling is fabulously detailed with very little of the smoothness many Blu-ray players exhibit with standard-def material.

Colours and core picture dynamics with DVDs are superb, and

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£4,500 worth of BD delight

HCC caught up with Denon's product marketing consultant **Roger Batchelor** and asked him to explain the thinking behind the brand's flagship AV deck

The awesome DVD-A1UD hails from a long line of flagship and universal disc players from beloved AV brand Denon. The heritage can be traced back to the DVD-5000 in the late '90s, the world's first DVD player to sport THX approval. But, in a credit-crunched AV market, what is the thinking behind a high-end play-everything machine like the A1UD?

Denon bigwig Roger Batchelor explains: 'Since the DVD-5000, Denon has continued to push the performance envelope and built a no-compromise universal player to head up the range. Not only does this offer audiophiles and videophiles a single-box reference source product, technologies developed for machines like the DVD-A1UD are eventually distilled down into more affordable machines in the range.'

Covering playback of Blu-ray, DVD, CD, HDCD, SACD, DVD-A, DivX and discs with compressed audio file formats, the A1UD is one of the most comprehensive spinners available today, and was originally specified to also incorporate HD DVD playback. But, with that format giving way to Blu-ray, commercially the HD DVD development budget was diverted into further improving audiophile CD playback and the inclusion of fully balanced stereo XLR outputs. With a recent tranche of music being re-released on both SACDs and DVD-A, including The Band, Genesis, King Crimson and The Beatles, clearly these high-resolution audio platters have not given way to music on Blu-ray just yet.

But the A1UD's real magic, and much of its cost, is wrapped up in the detail and design. The bespoke disc transport is built like a battleship, weighing in at 3.5kg on its own, in

order to reduce vibration microphony. To give you an idea of the depth of the design brief, the specification was to create a drive that would register minimal microphony in the pick-up when a tennis ball (57g) was dropped directly (from 30cm) onto the disc clamp. Needless to say, if you do this test on a standard disc mechanism it'll wobble and laser deflection would be spectacular.

It also boasts the first consumer use of Japan's Asahi-Kasei (AKM) AK4399 DAC chipsets, running 192kHz/32bit resolution at a staggering 123dB S/N ratio. Combined with AL32 digital processing to further improve the sound quality, the A1UD has more processing power for audio alone than most Blu-ray players can offer for audio, video and DSP combined. The technology Top Trumps list goes

on to include Realta HQV video processing and DenonLink 4th Edition with jitter elimination.

But is it £4,500 worth?

Says Batchelor: 'If you considered the cost of separate flagship machines to play Blu-rays and upscale DVDs, and then audiophile players for CDs, SACDs and DVD-A discs, you would end up with a lot of boxes and a very large bill. Denon in Japan makes a high-end CD player that retails at the equivalent of around £5,000 and much of the expertise from that device has gone into the development of the A1UD's CD performance alone.'

With reviewer Richard Stevenson clearly loving the deck, and the tech results backing him up, we certainly agree that the DVD-A1UD justifies its price ticket with every disc, Blu-ray or otherwise, you put in it.



Denon's Roger Batchelor says the brand's DVD-A1UD is a no-compromise player



Beneath the machine's hood is a wealth of cutting-edge componentry

→ Tech Labs

**High quality:**

The Denon's curved, brushed aluminium fascia hints at its high-end credentials

better than both my old DVD-3930 or my DVD-2500BT by a good margin (both of those machines can now be found on Ebay). On the downside, the Denon is sluggish to load some Blu-rays with access to BD-Live content. Our Tech Labs test disc took 100 secs to get to the menu screens. But hey, it gives you time to get the cork out of the Rioja before the film starts.

Frustratingly, my AVP-A1HD cannot be upgraded with the HDMI jitter-elimination circuitry of DenonLink 4th Edition, but it has been upgraded to vanilla DL4 – and the connection between the two is quite incredible. Dip into the menus (with a spare half-hour and hot sweet tea to hand) and you can send the image over HDMI with the audio transferring by Cat5 or Cat6 cable on DL4.

Once you have manually sorted the lip-sync, the sound is sumptuously huge, crisper than a frozen bag of Walkers and lightning-fast. TrueHD transfers seem to have been turned up a notch in pace and precision and DTS-HD Master Audio mixes have more scale and dynamic range than ever. It also allows multichannel Super Audio CD and DVD-Audio discs to bypass the HDMI altogether, further improving their already rather awesome clarity, although using the A1UD's internal DACs for either is arguably even better still!

Interestingly, Denon's Roger Batchelor recommended Chord's Active Silver HDMI cables with the

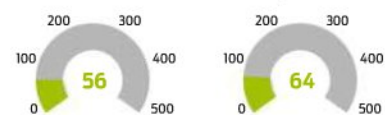
A1UD – so I called on Chord to join the party. Sure enough, the picture to my projector leaped up another notch, getting even closer to the Pioneer's colour vibrancy without sacrificing the Denon's inherent naturalness. And as the plaster is drying over the Active Silver now buried in the wall, it is worth noting that **choice of cable is important to elicit the very best from the A1UD** – much like the best high-end hi-fi.

This is a neat link into Denon's CD playback. If, like me, you have a fair-sized collection of music and actually listen to more CDs than you watch movies, the A1UD is a revelation. This is only the second universal disc player I have ever used that offers genuinely reference-quality performance with CD playback (the other being Linn's Unidisc and that doesn't do Blu-ray, natch).

Using the XLR outputs, the Denon A1UD sounds sweet, yet unerringly capable of revealing tiny dynamic detailing with microscope precision. Step up to rock music on CD, or better still on Blu-ray, and the Denon offers spectacular dynamic scale and a bass punch that will leave you gasping.

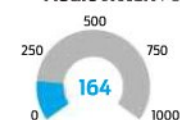
Universal soldier

So, in case you hadn't realised, I reckon the Denon DVD-A1UD is the reference disc-spinner by which all others will be judged for some time to come. It's not just a high-end Blu-ray player – it's so much more ●

Power consumption: Watts

Idling: Perhaps unsurprisingly, this monster uses around four times as much power idling than most BD players use in action

Powered: It's greedy on the power, alright

Audio Jitter: Ps

Sound: As an audiophile product as much about CD, SACD and DVD-A playback as Blu-ray, this excellent audio jitter is almost expected

Video Jitter: Ns

Vision: A very good video jitter result for the Denon DVD-A1UD suggests top-notch components and circuit design

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

43s

Tray in to main BD menu

100s

Disc loading & Java:

After an eternity waiting for the player to boot and open, it's another age before anything starts playing

**HCC VERDICT**

Denon DVD-A1UD
£4,500 Approx

Highs: Stunning life-like picture; genuine hi-fi sound; awesome DVD upscaling; brilliant connectivity
Lows: Complex to set-up; painful price tag

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Focal's Dome 5.1 system mixes quality audio performance with startling looks



Pleasure domes for all people

For most of us, high-end speakers are no more practical to own than Ferraris. **Alvin Gold** discovers a 'normal' system that delivers top results



Since the dawn of the home cinema market, multichannel loudspeaker systems have come in two broad categories.

One is based on standard specialist stereo audio practice – with traditional high-fidelity engineering – but with the number of speakers scaled up to provide the five or seven channels needed for multichannel audio formats. A subwoofer is sometimes provided to increase muscle and depth.

The other type is aimed at the user who objects to having his or her living room festooned with space-consuming loudspeakers. It will still use five or seven loudspeakers (aka satellites), but smaller than traditional types. In this case, a subwoofer, often a small one, is a prerequisite.

While Focal JMLab is one of Europe's leading hi-fi manufacturers of the former type of system and is best known in this field, its expertise with the Sib & Cub fashion-centric, compact system shows it can also dabble with the latter. And that skill has now been used to craft a hugely stylish successor, dubbed Dome.

There are a number of quality compact systems from recognised hi-fi marques designed to plug the gap between these two broad categories, from names that include, KEF, Cabasse, Bose, and B&W. Focal is not alone in attempting to marry

AV/CV

Product:
5.1-channel
sub/sat speaker
system with
pedestal stands
for front main
left-right
speakers

Position:
Top of the line
Focal sub/sat
system in
several colours

Peers:
B&W MT30;
Cabasse Eole 2;
KEF
KHT3005SE

attractive designer packaging with hi-fi audio standards. But on the basis of the Dome, it is undeniably one of the most successful.

Just small enough

Though a compact system, the dome-shaped satellites are not as small as some of the competition. As JMLab's comprehensive white paper explains (check it on the Focal website under /dome/downloads – though a better English translation would be nice), this came out of modelling the various possibilities, and extensive testing of prototypes, not just of various enclosure sizes, but also almost every possible iteration of enclosure design and drive unit disposition.

Focal has ended up with a 0.8 litre enclosure, but with the claimed performance of 1.4 litres, and its extensive R&D program shows that there is some justification for saying so. It houses a 4in bass/midrange unit and 1in dome tweeter to cover the range from 125Hz-25kHz within a tight ± 1.5 dB envelope at 31dBA, which barely alters at different power levels (i.e. dynamic compression is low). Most similar speakers use reflex (port) loading to extend the bottom octave, before a rapid rolloff, but Focal has rejected this arrangement in favour of a sealed box alignment. It has a gentler LF rolloff, which is -11dB at 70Hz with the intention of allowing

the Dome to perform effectively as a full-range system even without a subwoofer. Sealed bass-loading, along with other design decisions, means that power handling is also improved. But of course, there is a dome-shaped subwoofer to counter what is a fairly lean, dry balance when used without, and this is how I auditioned the system.

The system satellites and the subwoofer can be purchased individually, but buy this 5.1 package and you effectively save the cost of a sat. The stands are optional, but have been designed with the Domes in mind. They're tall, slender and surprisingly elegant, have a heavy base for stability, and allow the Dome to be rotated on two axes. **Connection cables enter the stands at base level, so there is little chance of tripping over the wires that run internally.**

If you want a stealth system, you can ignore the stand option and wall-mount the satellites.

A funky aesthetic feature is that the Domes are available in black, white and red, with bayonet-fitting grilles that conceal the drive units. You can also buy grilles in yellow or blue. Even the stands can be specified in black, red or white. The cabinets are finished in high gloss lacquered aluminium, and are of a very high standard. ➤



Choose your colour:

The Domes can be specced in red, black or white finishes – and you can opt for different colour grilles

The 100W, 8in Dome subwoofer is cute to look at – in a vacuum cleaner kinda way – and it's down-firing, so placement isn't a chore. Setup is fool-proof, too: the variable crossover setting includes a marked position to match the Dome satellites, and there's an auto-power off switch which means the sub will turn off after five minutes if it's not being fed a signal.

Stylish sound

Focal's Dome 5.1 sets standards for compact sub/sat systems, and it even makes sense as a compact stereo box system with the option to add a subwoofer later. True, it is a tad lightweight and small sounding if used without the subwoofer, but not terminally so. I used this configuration for some extended solo piano listening (including Idil Biret playing Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*), which came in comprehensively ahead of expectations.

The sound was percussive and, within reasonable limits, it could even be described as muscular with a richer than expected tonal palate, and respectable dynamics. Broadcast TV speech was also very well handled, though it was cleaner and more articulate with the grille covers removed.

But above all this is a home cinema package, and in this form it works really well. I used it married to

a Denon AV receiver and spun up *Vantage Point* on Blu-ray. Of course, it couldn't match the authority and presence of my bigger reference system (based on quality Mordaunt-Short speakers), but with the 8in subwoofer it delivered some real excitement. In the final car chase sequence, and the explosion repeated throughout the film, **it never lost its capacity to cause me to duck involuntarily**. Unusually, the Dome system can also play much louder than expected for one so compact, with no noticeable change in voicing as the volume increased.

I found it's important to listen on axis with the front satellites rotated to face the listener, and angled vertically so that the bottom edge of the bass unit is at ear height. This will avoid loss of clarity and fine detail. Furthermore, the sound is more integrated and homogenous when the front speakers are a reasonable distance from the listening plane, between, say, two and three metres.

Perfect match

So, the Dome system is flexibly configured, stylish and available in a variety of bright primary colours as well as black and white. But what really sets it apart is its refined, grown-up sound quality. If you're in the market for a discreet sub/sat array, then give this an audition ●

→ Specifications

Dome Satellites

Drive Units: 4in bass/midrange; 1in aluminium/magnesium dome tweeter

Enclosure: Two-way sealed

Frequency Response: 80Hz-28kHz (+/-3dB)

Sensitivity: 88dB

Power Handling: 25-100W

Dimensions: 172(w) x 144(h)

x 143(d)mm

Weight: 1.9kg

Dome Subwoofer

Drive Units: 8in polyflex bass driver

Enclosure: Bass reflex

Frequency Response: 38Hz-170Hz (+/-3dB)

Power rating: 100W

Dimensions: 276(w) x 400(h) x 276(d)

Weight: 8.2kg

Connections: LFE input; high-level input



HCC VERDICT

Focal JMLab Dome 5.1 system
£1,500 Approx

Highs: Bold, full and detailed sound quality for music and home cinema; gorgeous design

Lows: Larger cabinets will offer more presence; rival sub/systems are more affordable

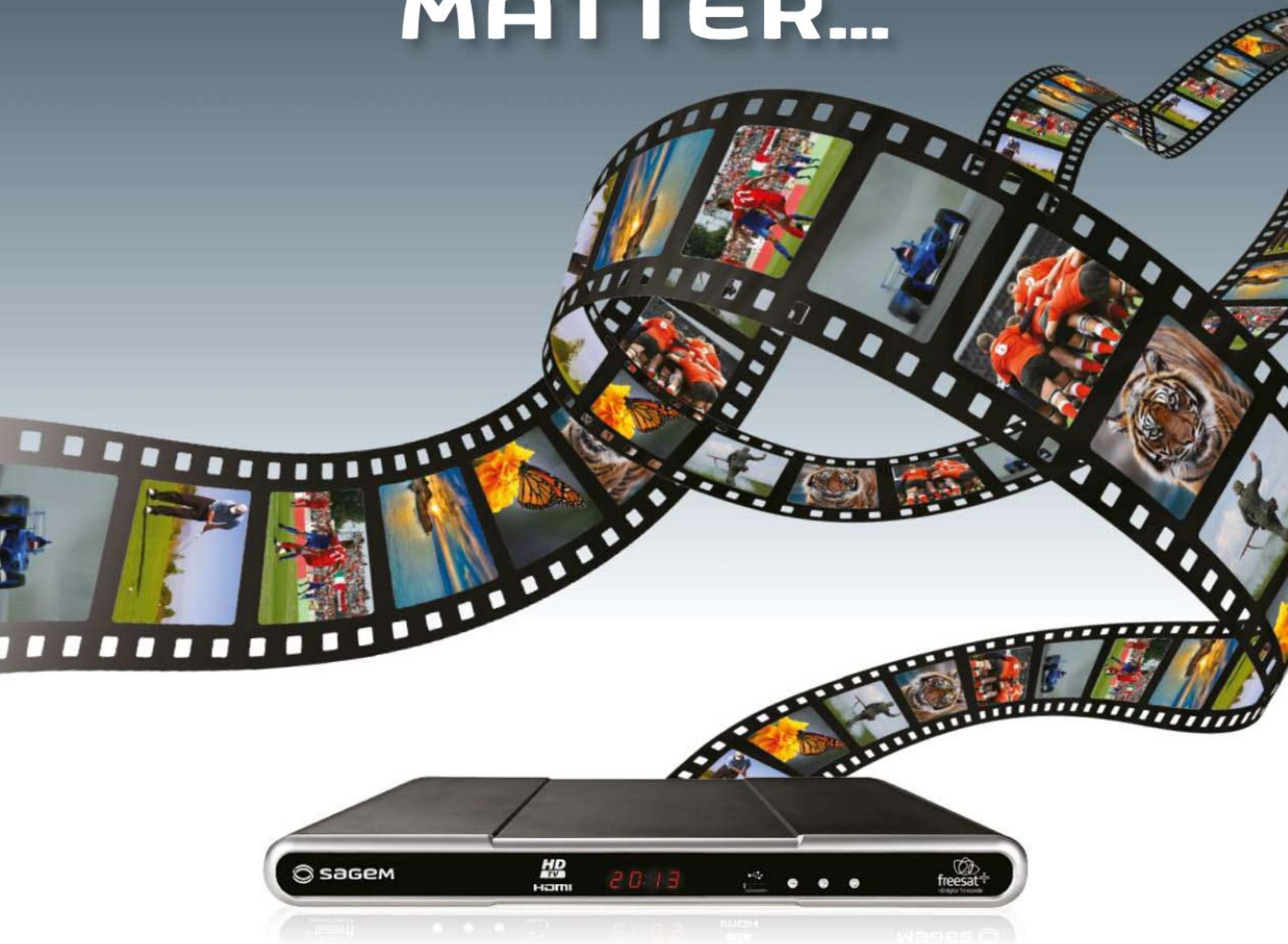
Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24
Tuner: YES Freeview plus CI slot
Component video: YES one input
HDMI: YES 4 x v1.3 HDMI's
PC input: YES D-sub 15 pin
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Brightness (claimed): 500 cd/m²
Contrast ratio (claimed): 3,000,000:1
Dimensions (w/o stand): 1,009(w) x 629(h) x 29(d)mm
Weight (w/o stand): 20.1kg
Features: LED backlight (side-firing, not local dimming); 100Hz TruMotion; Bluetooth connectivity; Intelligent Sensor 2; Seamless design; 8-day EPG; SimpLink (HDMI CEC); eManual; USB 2.0 port for media playback (JPEG, MP3, DivX); ISF calibration controls & wizard; 2 x Smart



LG has used LED technology to build a dazzling HD screen



Seamless style

Rik Henderson thinks LG's LED TV is more than just a pretty face



Much of the hype of LG's new LCD TV range, including the 42SL9000, has focused on its 'seamless' design. The glass on the front of the screen extends to the outer edge so therefore it is without, er, seams. Seemingly.

It's not 'borderless' or 'frameless' (buzzwords formerly adopted by the company's marketing machine, before realising that both can be disputed by anyone with eyes and the most basic understanding of descriptive adjectives) – it's 'seamless'. And it's very pretty.

Personally, though, no matter how tasty it looks on the outside, surely more should be made of what's on the inside? I think it would've been wiser to focus on the TV's other features – small things like usability and picture quality, that sort of thing. After all, both of them are well-worth shouting about...

The SL9000's picture quality is exceptional. Its LED backlight, which is the side-firing type, provides more than enough brightness to go around. However, I suspect that its images would be just as good with standard CCFL lighting, as it's the flexibility of its modes and ISF-certified calibration controls that makes for a cracking picture in any circumstance.

Expert fiddlers have a smorgasbord of sliders and functions to prod, poke and manipulate, but the set also accommodates beginners, occasional dabblers or the clinically indolent. While it's not new to this TV exactly, this is the first time I've come across LG's proprietary Picture Wizard. This allows you to calibrate the picture for any of the various inputs using a series of easy tests. Each step for contrast, brightness, colour, sharpness, etc, shows three stills with the middle one being the

recommended ideal; you then move the respective slider to make a fourth, central still look like the perfect one. You can then save this set-up to one of the two Expert modes (ISF-certified). Then you can do it again for a different ambient condition. Superb.

The end result of this speedy process can be genuinely awesome. *Inglourious Basterds* on Blu-ray looks extraordinarily good on the SL9000 after calibration. **It is a master at picking out fine detail in shadows**; there are several scenes in Tarantino's latest with low lighting, yet the LG screen displays every nuance with aplomb. And colour accuracy is, almost, reference status. I kid you not.

No local dimming

My only gripe is that without local-dimming on its backlight, there are better panels out there for black levels. However, those sets aren't necessarily as good with white levels and brightness. It's a trade off that, in this instance, works equally as well if not better. I am more than impressed with the contrast, regardless of blacks seeming less intense than on some rival TVs. Maybe that's why it's a 'seem-less' screen?

Joking aside, this is one exceptional television – more so, considering its price point. I've not even mentioned the multitude of other options. I've skirted around the 42SL9000's USB 2.0 media-playing abilities, 100Hz processing, Bluetooth connectivity and eco modes. I've failed to mention its superthin footprint, wealth of AV connections and capable audio performance. Why? Because it does the basics right, very right indeed. And that's all that matters ●

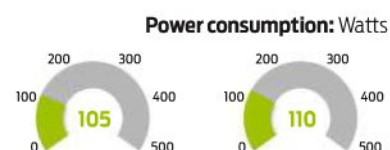
AV/CV

Product: LG's entry to the LED battlefield is extremely thin and features ISF-calibration controls

Position: At just shy of one grand it's a reasonably priced addition to the market. A 47in version is LG's flagship screen

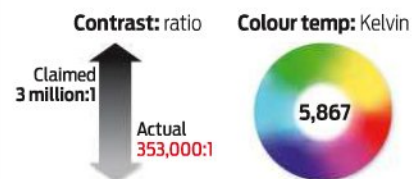
Peers: Samsung UE-40B7000; Sharp LC-40LE700E

→ Tech Labs



White screen: Another LED-lit screen that proves the tech really doesn't use as much power as plasma and CCFL panels

Test footage: A small increase in consumption with our test movie footage suggests the speakers aren't working too hard



Picture: In Standard mode contrast ratio is a more plausible 830:1; you'll have to select Vivid mode to get the 350,000:1 contrast figure. Luminance in Standard mode is 68.95fl

Presets: The small selection of CT presets offers no particularly accurate settings, but the ISF expert mode has a range of sophisticated colour balance parameters. Cool: 10,848K Medium: 8,299K Warm: 5,867K

HCC VERDICT

LG 42SL9000
£1,000 Approx

Highs: Exceptional pictures; ISF-certified calibration controls; superb Picture Wizard
Lows: Black levels aren't A-list; 'Seamless' design?

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Bargain brilliance

Is this budget-priced AV receiver a loss leader? **Richard Stevenson** suspects it may be, which can only be good news for the rest of us



Sony has been hitting hard in the serious-but-on-a budget sector of the AV receiver market, and the STR-DH800 promises to be a veritable Brian Lara. The £350 price tag is attractive in itself, but Sony's fairly loose pricing structure means that it's likely to go for even less, making this baby more exciting still. And don't be fooled by those numbers either – it boasts

7 x 85W, full HD audio decoding, auto set-up and Room EQ.

More to the point, while its humble price tag may suggest humble electronic design, the STR-DH800 has been tweaked and tuned by the same folks that brought us the lush ES series receivers. In fact, word on the street (well, Kyu kaigan-dori Ave outside Sony HQ) is that the team spent a whole lot more time and

Built to a price:

Don't expect much more than a plasticky fascia at this price point

money designing and tuning this amp than the retail price is ever likely to recoup. Could this be a serious product at a bargain price designed to secure market share and brand equity? (Otherwise known as 'doing an Onkyo').

I have my suspicions. Not least of which because the feature list of the STR-DH800 is long, comprehensive and jam-packed with proprietary



Sony technologies. Take, for example, BraviaSync for Sony TVs, or the DMport. Of course, Sony could have used USB, Ethernet or Firewire, but the company's DMport is a bespoke gateway to a range of accessories including iPod docks, Bluetooth receivers and network audio devices. Then there is S-Air, a wireless transmission technology for wire-free rear speakers. Okay, you will still need to purchase the Sony WAHTSA1 wireless transmitter and receiver amp, but it does save several miles of speaker cable to trip over.

On the less bespoke side, the little STR-DH800 also offers an FM/AM tuner with 60 presets, DeepColour and x.v.Colour compatibility, and a bi-amp mode should you only want to use a 5.1 multichannel speaker system.

Out of sight

I say 'little' for a reason. Despite being full width and quite tall, the depth front-to-rear is a waif-like 320mm, which makes it perfect for installing inside a typical furniture cupboard in

AV/CV

Product: Sony wolf in budget clothing

Positioning: Two up from the bottom of Sony's amplifier range

Peers: Denon AVR-1610; Onkyo SR-607; Yamaha RX-V765

the living room. As the power amps also run relatively cool, the STR-DH800 has immediately become a favourite recommendation to those who don't want their kit on show.

On the obvious missing list are any S-video inputs, multichannel inputs, hard-wired multiroom features and, surprisingly, video upscaling. Will you miss it, though?

Setup is as simple as connecting the supplied microphone and pressing Go, but the lack of an onscreen display is a bit surreal. Fuelled by having seen a long line of amps with high-tech multicolour GUIs, the Sony's simple front fascia-only display took a while to get used to. Then again, such simplicity does mean it is very difficult to mess anything up completely. Moreover, the day-to-day operation is slick, bug-free and intuitive. You just wouldn't expect anything else from the big S.

If there is one thing that really underlines the outstanding value of the DH800, it is the sound. For such an unassuming box of tricks, the

Sony punches out action and drama like its life depends on it. Bass is big, bold and brazen through all channels (when all speakers are set to large) and the sub comes in on top like a jackhammer. **With an adrenaline-fuelled movie like *Heat* on Blu-ray, the Sony is right at home banging out the bullets.** The effects are a little more hyperactive than sophisticated, but the bang you get per buck is incredible.

Sony's power claims are fair, too: our Tech Labs measured 87W-per-channel with five channels driven into 8Ω. No way near the levels reached by the big boys, but still a respectable figure.

A real smoothie

With a more genteel film like *Coraline* (Blu-ray), the Sony's rich and full-bodied approach offers a smooth and even-handed character. While really high-frequency effects don't exactly leap out of the speakers and syringe your ears, the sound is never fatiguing. Coraline's first

Sony's STR-DH800 is a £350 AV bargain



→ Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES plus Dolby Digital+, EX, Prologic IIx
DTS-HD Master Audio: YES plus DTS ES, 96/24, Neo:6
THX: NO That's wishful thinking at this price
Multichannel audio: YES 7 x 85W
Multichannel input: NO
Multiroom: NO Though optional S-Air wireless speakers can become a second zone
AV inputs: YES 4 composite – but no S-video; 4 x digital audio (3 x optical, 1 x coaxial)
HDMI input/output: YES 4-in, 1-out
Video upscaling: NO
Component: YES 3-in, 1-out
Dimensions: 430(w) x 320(h) x 158(d)mm
Weight: 8.3kg
Features: DMport connectivity; S-Air wireless speaker compatible; auto A/V sync; Digital Cinema Sound; Bravia sync; set-up mic; remote control; FM/AM tuner; DeepColour & x.v. Colour support; biamping; portable audio enhancer





No show: Another budget AVR that lacks multichannel inputs. Is this a sign of things to come?

meeting with Wybie Lovat on his bike is a sudden rush of sound with a big bass boost across all speakers. His push bike, which, for no easily explainable reason, sounds like a Harley Davidson Fatboy, and the near silence as he stops, is a massive dynamic swing. The dialogue is neat, clean and polished – albeit just a little softer and further back in the soundstage than absolutely ideal.

When Coraline first enters her 'other' bedroom with its immaculate furnishings, four dragonflies buzz around the room. This clip is an overt camera trick for the 3D video version, of course, but it is matched by a surround sound effect that pans across the soundstage. Well, it's supposed to. The Sony STR-DH800 does a clean job of creating the audio-effect but the dragonflies are confined to flapping around the centre of your room rather than outside the perimeter of your speakers. But this is a rather minor criticism, as the only amplifiers I have heard that really create the space are at least three times the price of the DH800.

The STR-DH800's character is very hard to dislike across a wide range of films, managing to draw you in to every one. Watching *The Matrix* (for the 45th time...) the amplifier and speakers simply disappear into the mix of great sound effects, and as the volume raises the Sony steps up the challenge admirably. The shots and metallic clang of the Agents' guns recycling explode into the room with a punch that firmly puts you on the edge of the seat. Switch to the BBC's *Life in HD* (through Sky HD) and the smoothness gives all due weight and respect to David Attenborough's unique voice.

I partnered the receiver with a number of speakers from the 'review samples I'm still waiting to be picked up' pile (this fills my hallway like the north face of K2), and it showed itself as reasonably speaker agnostic. The balance is probably better suited to smaller compact sub-sat systems or smaller-driver mains, which, at this end of the market, is what it is mostly likely to be paired with.

Multiroom – sort of

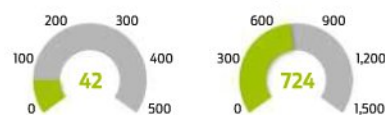
With no S-Air module to hand I could not try the wireless rear speaker concept. The optional pack comprises a transmitter module that plugs into a slot on the rear of the AVR and a slimline box receiver complete with two 100W S-Master amps for around £180 in total. And although you will never find this out from Sony's marketing literature (you have to get to page 81 of the manual) the output can be configured as main channels and sent to another room. As you can pair a couple of receiver/amps with the STR-DH800, the unit can be said to offer true multiroom wireless audio.

I spent rather a long time with this little Sony and I warmed to it the more and more I used it. Okay,

it's a little on the safe side at the top-end of the audio spectrum, which in turn keeps the soundstage rather compressed, but it does all-action feats well and is smoother than a panther in a smoking jacket. Add to this a wide gamut of AV goodies, some bespoke functions that allow you to expand the system at a later date, and its slick, simple operation, and Sony's STR-DH800 looks like a barnstorming bargain ●

Tech Labs

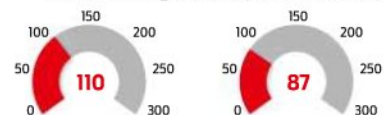
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: This isn't an inordinate power consumption – nor should it be from a modest amp like this

Powered: In five-channel mode with an 8Ω load the STR-DH800 draw 724W; with 4Ω, it's slightly over 1,000W

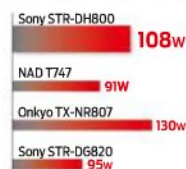
Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



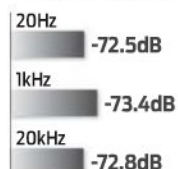
2-channel 8Ω: Our measured power rating in stereo performance is over specification

5-channel 8Ω: The 87W measurement in multichannel mode, is pretty much bang on spec

Untainted: Watts



Signal/noise: db



Fidelity firewall:

A measurement of power untainted by distortion (0.052THD, 8Ω, 1kHz), this Sony holds its own against even more high-end AVRs and happily outperforms the brand's last budget model

S/N tests:

The STR-DH800 delivers very solid S/N figures throughout the frequency spectrum



HCC VERDICT

Sony STR-DH800
£350 Approx

Highs: Superb value; big and smooth sound; easy to use

Lows: No video upscaling or multichannel inputs; could have a bit more sparkle

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

NEED MORE? JUST TAKE IT!

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LG part no. N2R1DD2

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1TB Hard Drive, 2-bay Blu-ray NAS
LG part no. N2B1DB2

2TB Hard Drive, 2-bay Blu-ray NAS
LG part no. N2B1DD2



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Seeing is believing

looking for a Home Cinema

How easy is it to buy a home cinema system that suits you? You could read the magazine product reviews, find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and place your order. When the system is delivered to your door in the box, you get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, an HD ready set or one with full 1080p capability? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or Blu-ray capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital and HDMI? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer.

This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis, that is without professional input, are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ... **don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

“...without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity”

cinema

LISTED HERE ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY.

Listed on this page are 20 of the best AV shops in the country. They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY



SERVICE



FACILITIES



VERDICT



Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to

its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

system?..

...Ask the experts



OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent SOUNDRAFT HI-FI

40 High Street. 01233 624441

Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI

216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245

Colchester RAYLEIGH HI-FI

33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY

9 High Street, Hampton Wick.

020 8943 3530

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE

36 Queen Street. 01628 633995

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI

44a High Street. 01268 779762

Custom Install Dept.

01268 776932

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI

132/4 London Road. 01702 435255

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA

69 London Road, Southborough.

01892 535007

LONDON

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI

190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.

020 7924 2040

Ealing AUDIO VENUE

27 Bond Street. 020 7924 2040

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE

163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION

48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS

93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA

17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227

York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen HOLBURN HI-FI

441 Holburn Street. 01224 585713/572729

Edinburgh LOUD & CLEAR

Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.

0131 555 3963

Glasgow GLASGOW AUDIO

135 Great Western Road.

0141 332 2200/4707



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

The Regza range now includes two 55in screens – this traditional LCD model and the flagship SV series LED panel



→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES up to 1080p24
Digital TV tuner: YES and CI slot
HDMI: YES 4 x HDMI v1.3
Component: YES 1 input
PC input: YES 1 x 15-pin D-Sub
Sound: 2 x 10W
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Brightness (claimed): 500 cd/m²
Contrast ratio (claimed): 100,000:1

Dimensions (w/o stand) mm: 1,370(w) x 910(h) x 102(d)mm
Weight: 37kg
Features: Resolution+ upscaling; Meta Brain processing; Eco Panel; Game Mode; Dolby Volume; AutoView ambient light sensor; Scart x 2 (1 x RGB); REGZA Link; 8ms response time

Deep Lagoon

Lacking the LED backlighting of Toshiba's SV panels, the big ZV set offers alluring value and 'Deep Lagoon' styling. **Jim Hill** dives in



Any home cinema fan will tell you that big is best when it comes to screen size. It's a philosophy Toshiba seems to understand too, having bolstered its Regza ranges to offer a choice of 55in sets. The high-end SV series really puts Toshiba back at the front of TV innovation, with local dimming LED backlights giving the mammoth display even more impact. This ZV set is the more frugal non-LED option, which dramatically reduces the price, so makes this set, in terms of pounds per square inch, something of a bargain.

To keep the cost down elsewhere, Toshiba has avoided complicated multimedia features like online connectivity and wireless media streaming in favour of more sensible picture-enhancing features like 200Hz motion processing and Resolution+ video upscaling. Other key boxes that Toshiba has ticked are Full HD resolution (naturally), a decent user interface and ample connectivity, including four HDMI ports. And as a bonus, there's also a USB port for inputting MP3s, JPEGs and video (including DivX) files, and an SD card slot for loading your digital snaps. Needless to say, this 55in screen makes a fine photo-viewer.

It's no wallflower either, even without the LED backlighting. The expansive screen is surrounded by a wide border that makes it look more like a 60in plasma, but its edges are softened by an attractive design feature that Toshiba calls Deep Lagoon. It refers to the way the single front piece of glass, which runs

right to the frame, fades from black to white at the edges to give an impression of depth. It's not the thinnest panel on the market either, although that's no practical disadvantage, while the stereo speakers deliver sound from behind the panel.

Up against the wall

You can wallmount this set just like any other flatpanel TV, so long as your bracket is of a certain strength, but the supplied stand is of a sleek and sturdy design, too. Setting up is a simple case of plugging in a terrestrial aerial and letting the autotune feature locate and load all of the Freeview and analogue channels. Toshiba has yet to offer a Freesat set, but with four HDMI ports there's plenty of room for external set-top boxes.

Toshiba's onscreen GUI isn't as slick as the graphics of, say, Sony or Samsung, but it's intuitive enough and with the big colour-coded keys of the remote control, it's easy to operate the TV straight out of the box. It's also relatively responsive, unlike the often rather sluggish channel changes you tend to find with Philips and older Samsung sets. The 8-day EPG is also usefully arranged for at-a-glance scheduling.

That big panoramic screen gives high-definition material real impact in Full HD mode. Using a 1080p24 feed (to avoid any scaling or processing) from a Panasonic Blu-ray player brings out the ravishing detail and vivid colours of JJ Abrams' *Star Trek*. The native 1080p resolution of the screen seems to bristle with

AV/CV

Product:
Full HD LCD TV with Meta Brain processor and Deep Lagoon design

Positioning:
The largest set in Toshiba's mid-price range

Peers:
Sony 50V5500;
Samsung PS50B650;
LG 50PS8000



Good looking:

Toshiba's distinctive Deep Lagoon bezel softens the impact of the 55in screen

warts-and-all detail. Not that the young crew of the *Enterprise* need to worry about their close-ups.

It's hard not to be impressed by the scale and accuracy of the picture, but in direct comparison, this set doesn't have the dark blacks of Panasonic's plasma screens and the colours are not the most vivid amongst LCD sets either. And, compared to Toshiba's own LED-lit panels, it's clearly not breaking any records in the contrast department either – something our Tech Labs reinforce with the screen's 1,150:1 contrast measurement in Dynamic mode. Greyscaling is actually very good on the whole, but during the darker scenes, there are times when black clothing, for instance, simply merges into the scenery.

Few precious artefacts

Thankfully, the 55ZV635D's features cut the mustard. Toshiba's Active Vision M200HD processing succeeds in reducing image lag without introducing motion artifacts. It's essentially combining 100Hz processing with intelligent backlight scanning to create smooth movement without the judder that could otherwise be very jarring on a screen of this size.

It sounds like some kind of weapon of mass destruction, but the MetaBrain Engine is what Tosh calls the processing chip that powers its Active Vision picture enhancement suite and Resolution+. The latter tries its best, but standard-definition material can still look pretty awful on

this 55in TV. LCD panels at this size are quite unforgiving of poor source material and some general Freeview channels are broadcast at horribly over-compressed bitrates. **My advice would be to rely as little as possible on upscaling** and stick to HD material where possible.

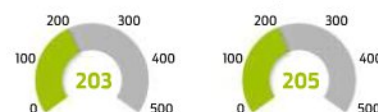
No audio justice

It's difficult for a TV of this stature to integrate speakers that can do it justice, and even at full volume, the 10W-per channel available doesn't measure up to the scale of the picture. However, it's by no means tinny, and the sound is well projected, so it'll do to be getting along with. Perhaps the best aspect of the audio is Dolby Volume – the simple circuit that equalizes your audio and stops those evil advertising soundtracks from deafening you in between programmes.

It might not have the razzamatazz of its more expensive LED sibling, or the exciting online functionality of an Ethernet-equipped set, but I'd still recommend this dazzlingly detailed behemoth for home cinema duties. LED backlighting is a big advantage in a bright room, but not essential for a dedicated cinema environment, and all of the key features, like a full set of inputs and decent motion processing, are present. And those shy speakers won't be an issue if you're planning to do this cinematic set justice and partner it with a full 5.1 home cinema system.

Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:

Unsurprisingly high considering the screen size, and usage increases to 255W in Dynamic mode

Test Footage:

Marginal increase at full volume, so the speakers can't be working too hard

TV Contrast: ratio



Picture:

Dynamic contrast ratio measured disappointingly low at 1,150:1, and standard mode was even lower at 510:1. Luminance at 89.12fl was relatively high

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:

A wide if unhelpfully labelled range of 11 CT presets includes the acceptable preset 2, and Expert mode features R/G/B Colour/Tint parameters for perfect adjustment
0: 5,605K
2: 6,340K
5: 7,419K
10: 10,935K



HCC VERDICT

Toshiba 55ZV635D
£1,800 Approx

Highs: Great screen size for price; Dolby Volume; useful USB and SD card slots

Lows: No Ethernet port; average contrast ratio; upscaled SD material looks poor at this size

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

SALE

SALE

SALE



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Panasonic DMPBD80.....Multi-Region.....	£249.95	
Pioneer BDPLX08.....	£699.95	
Pioneer BDPLX71.....	£529.95	
Pioneer BDPLX91.....	£1749.95	
Samsung BDP1600.....	£139.95	
Sony BDPS5000ESB.....	£989.95	
Sony BDP120.....	£249.95	
Sony BDPS560.....Multi-Region.....	£249.95	
Sony BDPS360.....	£149.95	
Sony BDPS760.....	£5ALE	
Sony BDHP22H.....	£144.95	
Sony DMRBS750.....	£609.95	
Sony DMRXS350.....	£439.95	
DVD RECORDERS		
LG RHT497H.....	£199.95	
Panasonic DMRXS350.....	£5ALE	
Panasonic DMREZ28.....Multi-Region.....	£174.99	
Panasonic DMREX98.250GB Multi-Region.....	£379.95	
Panasonic DMREX769.160GB Multi-Region.....	£239.99	
Panasonic DMREX79.250GB Multi-Region.....	£249.95	
Pioneer DVRLX61D.....250GB.....	£409.95	
Samsung DVD5H893.....Multi-Region.....	£164.95	
Sony RDRHXD1095B.500GB Multi-Region.....	£349.95	
Toshiba RD99DT.....Multi-Region.....	£214.95	
DVD & BLU-RAY HOME CINEMA SYSTEMS		
Panasonic SCPT870.....	£319.95	
Panasonic SCPT570.....Multi-Region.....	£289.99	
Panasonic SCPT470.....Multi-Region.....	£199.95	
Panasonic SCPT170.....Multi-Region.....	£149.99	
Panasonic SCBT200.....Blu-Ray.....	£5ALE	
Panasonic SCBTX70.....Blu-Ray.....	£479.95	
Samsung HTBD7200.....Blu-Ray.....	£5ALE	
Samsung HTBD1220.....Blu-Ray.....	£5ALE	
Sony BDVE300.....Blu-Ray.....	£5ALE	
Sony BDVZ7.....Blu-Ray.....	£5ALE	

Blu-ray in a box

Martin Pipe warms to LG's HB354BS lifestyle 2.1 BD solution



It may only be a budget 2.1 Blu-ray system, but LG's elegant HB354BS is still a fountain of plenty, packing a centrally-mounted iPod dock, fine-tuning by audio guru Mr Mark Levinson, an FM tuner and direct YouTube access via its rear-mounted Ethernet jack. In Blu-ray terms it's up to scratch, with Profile 2.0 BD-Live capability and decoding of DTS-HD and Dolby TrueHD soundtracks.

Cynics might argue that there's little point in supporting hi-res audio on a system like this, but the satellite speakers are surprisingly good – the high frequencies are handled by dome tweeters which, to be frank, I didn't expect at this price point. The associated 3in mid-range drivers are plastic-coned, while at the heart of the passive subwoofer is a 5.5in driver. Unfortunately, the system can't be upgraded to 5.1 with additional LG-branded amps and speakers at a later date – you could, however, use it as a BD deck in a more advanced setup based around an AV receiver, thanks to the HDMI output.

The whole system is controlled via some nicely-designed and responsive menus, and Blu-ray loading times are also acceptable. My only gripe in terms of its feature

set is the USB media player doesn't follow in the footsteps of some LG Blu-ray decks and support mkv/x.264 video.

Performance

Spin a movie and the good impressions continue. Treble is crisp and well-defined, and while the virtual surround audio system is hardly up to the standards of a conventional 5.1 rig, it creates a reasonable spread of sound. The subwoofer lets things down a bit, though. It can throw out generous quantities of low frequencies into the modestly-sized rooms the system is obviously intended for, but did sound rather coloured and uncontrolled on occasions.

Video performance is as good as that from some of the standalone LG players I've seen – intricate Blu-ray details are conveyed well, and there's oodles of depth. DVDs are also upscaled to a good standard without any fuss.

So, while at first I feared this designer system might have more style than substance, I have no trouble recommending the HB354BS as a great starter package or one for the bedroom.

AV/CV

Product: Design-orientated 2.1 Blu-ray system

Position: LG's only 2.1 Blu-ray products. 5.1 and soundbar systems are also available

Peers: Samsung HT-BD7200; Panasonic SC-BTX70; Sony BDV-Z7

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: As a BD/2.1-channel speaker system, 30W while idling isn't a relatively low power consumption figure

Playing: 320W with the three speakers at full pelt suggests LG's own power ratings are quite accurate

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

4s

Tray in to main BD menu

45s

Disc loading & Java: The LG system boots up our test disc at a respectable pace

→ Specifications

Upscaling: YES 1080p
Multiregion: NO Region B Blu-ray/R2 DVD
HDMI: YES 1 x v1.3 out, 2 x v1.3 in
Component: YES up to 1080i
Multichannel analogue: NO stereo inputs only
Digital audio: YES coaxial and optical inputs
SACD/DVD-A: NO/NO Don't be daft
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD MA decoding: YES/YES
Dolby True HD / DTS-HD MA bitstream: NO/NO
Profile 2.0: YES if suitable USB memory device is connected
Dimensions: 430 (w) x 76 (h) x 379 (d) mm (system unit)
Weight: 4.8kg (system unit)
Features: 1080p/24; FM radio; iPod dock; 75W to each front speaker and 100W subwoofer; MP3/WMA/JPEG/DivX/XviD playback; YouTube access

HCC VERDICT

LG HB354BS 2.1 Blu-ray system
£400 Approx

Highs: Decent overall performance; well-featured; glamorous design

Lows: Restricted upgrade potential; won't play mkv/x.264 content

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Multi-format maestro

An affordable, flexible media streamer gets **Chris Jenkins'** approval

In the current flood of affordable media players, the Xtreamer claims to be 'the cheapest way to play and stream HD (MKV H.264) movies or user-generated videos, listen to high-quality digital music and show high-resolution slideshows of your family photos on your TV.'

In effect, it's a very flexible multimedia player that sits on your network, talks to your PC, and streams media to any networked or AV device. It's basically a lightweight plastic drive enclosure with AV, USB and LAN connections. You fit a 2.5in SATA hard drive of your choice up to 500GB, although we fitted a 640GB Western Digital solid state drive, which seemed to work fine.

A bundled remote control handset is used to navigate through a series of clear, colourful onscreen menus.

Format support is comprehensive, including MPEG-1/-2/-4, VOB, MKV, FLV, XviD, MP3, WAV, WMA, and FLAC.

By default, Xtreamer supports Web services including YouTube, Picasa, Yahoo Video and CNN, BBC Podcasts and RSS feeds including Yahoo News; presumably this will expand with time.

Sockets include a 1080p-capable HDMI v1.3 output, USB 2.0 host which can be used to expand memory up to 3Tb, a USB 2.0 slave, and an Ethernet 10/100 connection for networking. An optional extra is a Wi-Fi 802.11n USB antenna kit, so you can do all this wirelessly, although I wouldn't expect a reliable HD performance without a wired connection.

Highs

- The Xtreamer is



affordable, supports a wide range of formats, and is very easy to use.

- Offers basic Web support as standard, and wireless as an option, putting it in a good position compared to competing media streamers.

Lows

- The Xtreamer doesn't yet support BDMV, the Blu-ray disc structure, though it seems likely this will be added by an update.
- You might find the fan noise to be intrusive – a cooler kit is an optional extra.

HCC VERDICT

Xtreamer
£100 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

ZYXEL NSA-220PLUS → £150 Approx → www.zyxel.co.uk

Prince of NAS scene

Rik Henderson puts all his media files in storage

An update on the NSA-220, the 'Plus' edition of this NAS box (Network-attached Storage) offers the option of greater capacity (up to 3TB) and is DLNA 1.5-certified for compatibility with a vast array of modern media devices. It doesn't come with hard drives (it's just a shell) so you'll have

to add one or two yourself (it can take two drives of up to 1.5TB each).

The box sits on your home network via Ethernet cabling and also has two USB 2.0 connections for hook-up with further external hard drive/memory sticks – files on which can be automatically copied across at the press of a button.

Other features include an auto-upload mode for photos and video to Flickr and YouTube, a BitTorrent client and software to perform complete back-ups of your system.

Highs

- Access to the 220Plus is via HTML (webpage) and is nicely spaced out and easy to navigate, as long as you're fairly computer literate.

- While basic, the BitTorrent client does a good job and maintains a decent speed of download. It also places files in easily identifiable folders, which can then be transferred to other shares (folders).
- It's a doddle to set up, from fitting the internal hard drives (into two bays) to creating shares and linking it with iTunes and other software.

Lows

- Hard drives need to be acquired separately, adding a fair whack to the cost (depending on the capacity).
- GUI and auto back-up software is only PC-compatible – no Mac support here, folks.

HCC VERDICT

Zyxel NSA-220Plus
£150 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



In Brief

Sky Player
Xbox 360
From £15 p.m.



Imagine that you live in a flat that's a) a listed building, and b) is not in a Virgin Media-cabled area. Nightmare, huh? Especially if you're a big footy fan.

Not any more though – all you need is an Xbox 360, the internet to plug it into and a subs to Sky Player, the service that streams top channels (including Sky Sports) to your TV. Result!

1 2 3 4 5



This US-designed AVR cuts an imposing figure



Cash for brash

Over-priced and over here, and that's just **Richard Stevenson**. But what of the big and brassy AVR-1, which costs £6,000 before you've got the remote?

You may not have heard of AudioControl, but it is a sizeable 30-year-old company and a big hit back in its native US of A. The company is probably most famous for its in-car equipment but it has a growing reputation for home theatre gear; often great value and often selected by installers for classy home cinemas. The company's marketing and attitude is a bit loud, a bit lairy and a bit

in-yer-face, but they are American so we expect that.

The Concert AVR-1 is the latest flagship AV receiver – or as AudioControl like to call it, its premium Home Theater Platform. By the time it has hit UK shores, it retails for a not inconsiderable £6,000 plus a remote control. What, no remote as standard? Correct, because AudioControl believes that the very best remote is a dedicated

multi-function device such as the Philips Pronto (£1,150) for which the company supplies dedicated interface software. At nearly £7,500 we are getting into serious territory, well above the top-end Pioneer, Denon, and Yamaha models and beginning to encroach on the bottom end of Krell, Lexicon and Anthem territory. Serious stuff.

Starting from the outside, the AVR-1 is about as subtle as a



→ Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES plus Dolby Digital +
DTS-HD Master Audio: YES plus ES 6.1 Discrete
THX: NO

Multichannel audio: YES 7 x 120W

Multichannel input: YES 7.1

Multiroom: YES Zone 2 (audio and video), Zone 3 (audio)

AV inputs: YES, 5 x composite, 5 x S-video; 7 x digital audio (4 x optical, 3 x coaxial)

HDMI input/output: YES 5-in, 2-out

Video upscaling: YES to 1080p

Component: YES 5-in, 1-out

Dimensions: 430(w) x 320(h) x 158(d)mm

Weight: 8.3kg

Features: Ethernet for audio streaming; High efficiency Class H amplification; Dolby Volume; USB input for WMA, MP3, FLAC, MPEG-4, Ogg Vorbis and WAV; RS232 installer interface; supplied set-up mic; FM/AM tuner; vTuner; basic filtering room EQ

motorway pile-up. It's huge, monstrously heavy, and the cosmetics are straight out of the McIntosh bling school of design. The fascia is black glass with enough blue LEDs to read a book by at ten paces, and the dot-matrix style LCD display powers up with a full width/full height company logo like a Las Vegas slot machine. The casework looks like an exercise in structural engineering, particularly with its rack-mount cheeks in place, and the rear panel offers speaker binding posts capable of accepting cables up to steel-shipping hawser size. Connectivity is faultless, with a good number of pretty much every input/output you could need for the most serious AV set-up.

The features list is certainly not left wanting, with full decoding for all the regular Dolby and DTS formats over HDMI; full network access via Ethernet; USB with streaming control; 5-in 2-out HDMI sockets, and a full set of installer features.

These include multizone outputs, 12V triggers, IR repeaters and RS232 integration. There is nothing in the features set that would not be trumped by a £2K Onkyo, but

AV/CV

Product: Installer-focused high-end AV amp from the US of A

Positioning: AudioControl's only home cinema multichannel receiver

Peers: Denon AVP-A1HD; Pioneer SC-LX90

AudioControl's big push is premium sound quality derived from its innovative Class H amplifier topology.

Class H amplifiers take the idea of stepped voltage rails further by offering an infinitely variable power-supply voltage. It's a complex design in terms of engineering, but it allows the power amps to run at optimum efficiency by tracking the input signal and adjusting the voltage rail output accordingly in real time. Under idling or low volume conditions, the AVR-1 ticks over, running cool and merely sipping a few watts from your mains supply. Crank up the volume or get a big program demand such as an explosion and the power supply voltage raises instantly to ensure massive dynamic headroom. **The upshot is an amp that only draws as much current from the wall as is required, wasting very little in heat.**

That's green credentials. Of a sort.

Basic menu

As the Pronto and set-up mic both failed to turn up with the review sample, I had to resort to the front panel controls to run the setup; the

auto-set-up feature only provides very basic filtering room EQ anyway, so I stuck to manual rather than risk using an uncalibrated mic. Unfortunately, AudioControl's menu-driven interface is a bit clunky and I do miss the pretty-pictures and interactive GUIs of other top-notch designs. The left-right, up-down and select keys on the front panel don't necessarily drive the menus in the direction you expect, but generally set-up wasn't too painful even without the Pronto.

Let me get the bad bit out the way first by stating that our sample AVR-1 was a bit 'buggy'. It's Insect House at London Zoo buggy, in fact. Chances are that by the time you read this many of the issues will be sorted by firmware updates, but I had a full gamut of aggro, including HDMI syncing issues, getting video from one input and audio from another, long pauses of silence after changing sources, a jumpy volume control, and occasionally no sound at all. It does make you realise just how slick the big Japanese manufacturers are when they release a complex product like a multi-function AV receiver.



Two for the money: With its twin HDMI outputs, the Concert AVR-1 is ideal for a setup with both projector and flatscreen

Thankfully, the bugs tended to be set-up and control related, meaning that when the AVR-1 was doing its thing it really got down to business with unfettered aplomb. The sound is effortless, extended and richly decorated with effects.

I called up the opening sequence of *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, which tracks Wolverine and Sabretooth through the centuries, and the score was thrust into the room with serious pace and full-throttle action. Likewise, the black-and-white homage to *Saving Private Ryan* was crafted with huge scale; each bullet sound thumped into my chest.

There is a solidity and focus to the AudioControl's sound that makes a lot of the competition seem slightly thin by comparison, although the offset is a smaller and more compact soundstage. With big, floor-standing speakers you can hear the power coursing through the AVR-1 as it takes a firm grip on the drivers, never sounding uncontrolled or flappy – even at silly volumes.

The crashing explosion as the cooling tower collapses towards the end of *...Wolverine* let the AVR-1 show its mettle with huge scale and fabulous dynamic rush. It never once made me wince with a rough splash at the top end or an over-shrill note to a soundtrack score. It's a thoroughly smooth, solid and refined sound, and blessed every movie I tried with a real tangible presence.

Safe and sound

If the Concert AVR-1 lacks anything it is a little flair, something just occasionally edgy and reckless that

would imbue some of the more overt effects with larger-than-life sparkle. It's certainly not an amp to throw caution to the wind and let rip with gay abandon, but at the same time it stoically refuses to get out of shape. It is simply an enjoyable, detailed listen with a wide range of films.

A brief sojourn with *Elizabeth* on Blu-ray (it's the wife's, honest) again highlighted **the AVR-1's strength in its solidity and detail**, although dialogue remained just a little too smooth and recessed for my taste. Scene ambience, particularly outdoors, was somewhat smaller than ideal, but lacked little in terms of detailing. As my floorstanders are a little rolled-off towards the top end I suspect partnering different speakers would allow the AVR-1 to shine even more.

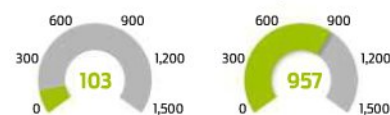
Hardcore

The Concert AVR-1 is clearly a hardcore installer product, so many of the set-up issues will be done and dusted before the end-user gets his hand on the programmed Pronto. Its balance certainly favours up-front speakers, probably in-wall designs that can sound a bit forward due to operating in an unsealed cavity.

Comparing it to top-flight models from Denon or Pioneer is a bit like comparing apples with pencil sharpeners, but its price point is deliciously nearer the Japanese consumer marques than other US exotica. In the context of a high-end, well-appointed, fully-serviced custom installation, the AVR-1 has a lot to offer and is something of a £6,000 bargain ●

→ Tech Labs

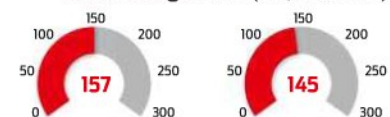
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: 103W while idling doesn't seem particularly eco-friendly, but it's normal for a seven-channel amp

Powered: Power consumption in 5.1 mode is 957W – a typical figure for an AVR of this type

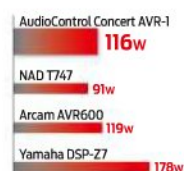
Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



2-channel 8Ω: The AudioControl's stereo power rating of 157W is meaty, and over the brand's own 120W per-channel spec

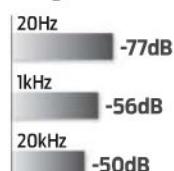
5-channel 8Ω: Five-channel performance is also above specification

Untainted: Watts



Fidelity firewall: A measurement of power untainted by distortion (0.052THD, 8Ω, 1kHz). This figure suggests this device can be run quite hard

Signal/noise: dB



S/N tests: Very good results at low frequencies give way to average figures at mid and high frequencies



HCC VERDICT

AudioControl Concert AVR-1
£6,000 Approx

Highs: Robust, potent and rewarding sound; installer-friendly

Lows: Lacks features compared to Japanese super amps; remote control costs extra

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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Going for gold

MA's distinctive gold tweeters are right at home in the reworked Radius speakers. **Jim Hill** tests their mettle



The Radius HD sub/sat system should blend in to most living rooms

Monitor Audio once made cabinets big enough to bury a body in, but recently it's had better business from its smaller boxes, and we've seen them shrink right down to the Radius 45HD satellites that fit in the palm of your hand. This is the slightly larger step-up Radius 90HD system – an evolution of the original Radius designs but with HD branding.

The first-generation Radius models succeeded in making hi-fi speakers that blend into the room, and the HD revisions are essentially more of the same – but better. HD doesn't refer in anyway to hi-def visuals, of course, but it's a fashionable moniker.

The Radius range is successful as it puts all Monitor Audio's strengths into one affordable speaker. The compact enclosures are finished in a choice of high quality veneers and use MA's home-grown 101mm MMP II bass drivers. It's this metal matrix polymer material that gives the speakers a matching metallic finish and fast and accurate response.

But it's the characteristic 25mm gold dome tweeter that's the most distinctive component. No, Monitor Audio didn't choose this material for its bling value – it's more to do with its ultra lightweight and durable properties. Monitor Audio has been further refining its various metal alloy cones, including this tweeter, to achieve an ever-wider dynamic range.

Get set, go

In this 5.1 package, the compact R90HD speakers form the front pair and rear channels (they're sold as pairs), while the elongated R180HD is the centre channel, and the R370HD subwoofer supplies the bass.

Their modest scale make them ideal for placing around a flat panel TV, and in this gloss black finish they suit the current trend for shiny black TVs rather well.

The R90HDs can be wall-mounted, if you leave room for the rear ports to breath, while the front-ported R180HD even has its own wall bracket. There are also optional tall speaker stands, which provide just the right amount of lift for the rear speakers, and, although they look unstable, provide a very steady platform. Part of the system's attraction is its flexibility, so it should suit most small to medium sized cinema rooms.

Each speaker feels well-crafted, and if you use the supplied tool to

prize off the metal grilles, you'll appreciate the precision engineering of the metal drivers.

At the back of each satellite is a single pair of robust binding posts for your cables. Connected up to a reasonably powerful AV receiver, in this case a Marantz SR-6003, I found it easy to get the five speakers singing in tune. **The identical drive units are perfectly voice-matched,** despite the different orientation of the centre speaker.

Persuading the little subwoofer to play in time takes a little longer. Relying on your amp's auto-calibration isn't quite enough to bring the bass into sync with the speakers and some additional tweaking is needed to stop it sounding disjointed. Get it right, though, and you'll be listening to a remarkably open and revealing sound system.

Sensitive kind

The new Radius speakers are slightly more sensitive than the originals. A wider dynamic range makes them more expressive in the mid to high frequencies, with a quick and punchy pace and an enjoyably snappy presentation. This makes the centre channel very good at delivering precise dialogue, so even Mulder's mumbles in the *X-Files: I Want To Believe* Blu-ray, are decipherable.

But what's missing is bass. If set too high, it sounds disembodied and unsuitable for explosive action flicks. The sub has auto shut-off when there's no signal and top-mounted controls. But while punchy, it's not especially deep and won't add the bass weight you need in a large room.

But it's still an engaging and immersive system, and its incisive tone is well suited to atmospheric soundtracks. The rears, like the fronts, are uncannily adept at conveying fine detail. The fast timing and expressive mid-band is perfect for acoustic music. On Nick Drake's *Treasure* Super Audio CD I heard every nuance of his whimsical melodies, but with more beat-driven stuff there's a danger of leaving the subwoofer behind.

Monitor Audio is clearly hoping its new Radius speakers will have universal appeal, and they're certainly flexible enough to install almost anywhere bar a really large living room. But while I enjoy a subtle soundtrack laid bare by a revealing set of speakers, I suspect there are others who will prefer a warmer tone than these metallic cones deliver. It's a case of suck it and see ●

→ Specifications

Radius 90-HD LCR (satellites)

Drive Units: 1in gold dome tweeter; 4in polymer mid-range
Enclosure: Two-way ported
Frequency Response: 80Hz-35kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Power Handling: 100W
Dimensions: 125(w) x 198(h) x 140(d)mm

Radius 180-HD (centre)

Drive Units: 1in gold dome tweeter; 4in polymer mid-range
Enclosure: Two-way ported
Frequency Response: 60Hz-35kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Power Handling: 100W
Dimensions: 350(w) x 125(h) x 105(d)mm

Radius R370-HD (subwoofer)

Drive Unit: 10in long-throw downfiring C-CAM cone
Enclosure: Sealed, MDF
Frequency Response: 25Hz-120Hz
On board power: 250W Class D amplifier
Dimensions: 320(w) x 370(h) x 320(d)mm
Weight: 11.87kg
Connections: 12 volt trigger input; stereo/LFE phono inputs; stereo/LFE link outputs



AV/CV

Product: Lightweight 5.1 array best-suited to small and medium rooms

Position: Affordable 'HD' second generation of downsized Radius range

Peers: MJ Acoustics Xeno; Wharfedale Diamond 10; KEF C Series



HCC VERDICT

Monitor Audio Radius 90-HD/180-HD Centre/R370-HD Sub
 £1,275 Approx

Highs: Compact and convenient design; descriptive metal drivers; rhythmic mid-band

Lows: Tricky subwoofer integration; not enough bass for a large cinema

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

DVD's last hurrah?

Danny Philips polishes his pictures with Toshiba's new upscaling deck



AV/CV

Product: Upscaling DVD player with XDE processing

Positioning: Cheaper successor to the XDE-500

Peers: LG DVS-450H; Onkyo DV-SP406

The demise of HD DVD left Toshiba stumbling around the hi-def darkness like an old man with cataracts. Its answer was to launch a DVD upscaler with eXtended Detail Enhancement (XDE) to convince the world it didn't need hi-def after all.

The XDE-500 was good but taking on the might of Blu-ray with an upscaling DVD deck is like bringing a knife to a gunfight. Coupled with its then refusal to turn to the Blu side, Toshiba looked misguided.

Now that the company has developed its own BD player, this follow-up XDE model can be judged in the right context, rather than as a substitute for a Blu-ray deck.

First off, the XDE-600 dumps the dour design of its predecessor for a swanky gloss-black finish and sloping grey fascia. A USB port is on hand for MP3, WMA, DivX and JPEG playback, but more exotic formats like DivX HD and MKV are off limits.

The socketry is par for the course, but the all-important HDMI output offers one unusual tidbit. Not only does it fire upscaled 1080p pictures to your display, but it can also output NTSC DVDs at 24Hz, potentially resulting in smoother movement for film-derived material – although you'll need to get the deck chipped for Region 1 discs.

The star attraction is XDE, which aims to bring upscaled pictures closer to HD quality. It comes in three modes: Sharp, which enhances edge definition and pimps detail in the areas where it's needed most; Colour, which tweaks the palette to achieve the most natural balance, particularly with blues and greens; and Contrast, which improves detail in dark scenes and makes bright scenes punchier.

I found Contrast the most satisfying. It boosts detail in murky surroundings – think the sloth victim's pad in *Se7en* – with nigh-on miraculous powers, keeping the filmic feel of the picture with consistent black depth and solidity.

Handles with care

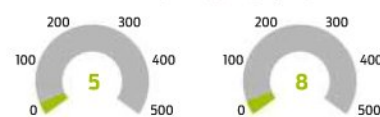
Colour Mode is also far better than expected, showing surprising dexterity by boosting small patches of colour without affecting other areas. Flicking it on and off during an office shot in *The Departed*, the blue sky seen through a window looks more vivid and natural without changing the rest of the image.

The detail enhancing skills of Sharp Mode (which also apply to Colour and Contrast) are clear as day. Edges snap into focus, the clarity of fine patterns and textures is greatly improved and the whole picture is punchier. There's a touch of hard white ghosting, and it can bring unwanted attention to film grain or block noise, but not enough to ruin the picture. Overall, I'm impressed.

Stripped naked of XDE, upscaled pictures are less impressive. Blacks meld into each other, detail goes AWOL and colours seem flatter. But you'd never really turn the mode off. With it, this may be the best sub-£100 upscaling DVD player around. And possibly the last ●

→ Tech Labs

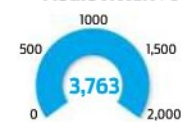
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Using only 5W in standby, the Toshiba XDE-600 isn't going to upset Greenpeace...

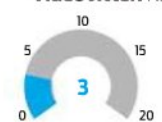
Playing: Nor will it when spinning a DVD. 8W is about half the power use of a standard Blu-ray deck

Audio Jitter: Ps



Sound: A very high analogue audio jitter figure suggests you won't want to use this deck as a CD player

Video Jitter: Ns



Vision: Our analogue video jitter result, however, is very good, hinting at a quality construction



HCC VERDICT

Toshiba XDE-600
£80 Approx

Highs: XDE-boosted pictures; USB port for other file playback

Lows: Pictures without XDE enabled are lacking in many areas; lightweight build quality

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Video upscaling: YES up to 1080p

Multiregion: NO Region 2 only

HDMI: YES v1.3a

Component: YES 1 output

Multichannel phono: NO stereo only

Digital audio: YES coaxial and optical

Dimensions: 430(w) x 42(h) x 197(d)mm **Weight:** 1.5kg

Features: DivX, MP3, JPEG and WMA file support; front-mounted USB; eXtended Detail Enhancement; Dolby Digital/DTS bitstream output/decoding; Regza Link; three-stage zoom; x100 scan mode; Enhanced Audio Mode; 24Hz NTSC output

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High-grade tank

The Popcorn Hour C-200 is a media jukebox with grand ambitions. So why isn't **Steve May** more enthusiastic?

When it comes to intuitive media streaming and integrated NAS (network attached storage) the family of Network Media Tank products from Popcorn Hour spring readily to mind. Using simple but effective middleware from Syabas, these boxes have built a huge (and deserved reputation) for being easy to use and generally bomb-proof in a sector riddled with flakiness. Indeed, the A-110 and the upmarket HDX-1000 variant from HD Digttech, remain firm favourites. So when news of an upgraded version, the C-200, first began to filter through, I was undeniably excited.

However, after using one for a couple of weeks, I've come to the conclusion that the C-200 may not be a clear step in the right direction.

Perhaps the most obvious first point of difference is the size of the unit. With this new iteration, Popcorn Hour has produced a full-sized component that's as wide as a standard DVD player and in some cases taller. Unlike previous models, it ships with a multifunction drive bay. Users can plug in either a hard drive for local storage or a Blu-ray drive. I'm puzzled rather by the provision for the latter. The C-200 does not make much sense in its Blu-ray configuration, given the growing sophistication (and affordability) of standalone BD-spinners.

Shipped diskless, I installed a Seagate Barracuda 1TB drive into our review sample. Installing the HDD proved quick and easy, although it should be noted that the manual

AV/CV

Product: Networkable media streamer/player/jukebox

Position: Popcorn Hour's most ambitious streamer/NAS yet to use the Syabas Network Media Tank middleware

Peers: Popcorn Hour A-110; HD Digttech HDX-1000; Western Digital WDTV Live

supplied with the unit is sparse and generally unhelpful.

Heavy metal

The metal chassis inspires confidence and component quality is high. Beneath the lid is a Sigma Designs SMP8643 chipset with 667MHz CPU, allied to 512MB of DD2 DRAM and 256MB of NAND flash memory. Backside connectivity comprises a bunch of stuff, but you only really need to use the HDMI input and Gigabit Ethernet. Unlike previous models, there's a helpful dot matrix LCD status display window.

Traditionally, NMTs have two siren-like attributes: extensive file support and access to IPTV-style content. The latter is great. Dig down into the community menus and you'll find plenty to stream and enjoy. There

→ Specifications

Connectivity: Bonjour; UPnP SSDP; UPnP AV; Windows Media Connect; Windows Media Player NSS; Samba; NFS; BitTorrent P2P; Usenet downloader

NAS Access: SMB; NFS; FTP

Media file support: AVI; ASF; WMV; MKV; MOV (H.264); MP4; RMP4; XVID SD/HD; MPEG-1; MPEG-2; MPEG-4; WMV9; VC-1; AAC; M4A; MPEG audio (MP1, MP2, MP3, MPA); WAV; WMA; FLAC; OGG; JPEG; BMP; PNG; GIF; TIFF

Web Services: Vuze; Revision 3; CNET TV; Mediafly; Veoh; Mevio; Bliptv; Break Podcast; etc

Audio passthrough: DTS; DTS-HD HR; DTS-HD MA; Dolby Digital; Dolby Digital Plus; Dolby True HD

Memory: 512MB DDR2 DRAM, 256MB NAND Flash

AV inputs: HDMI v1.3; component video; S-video; composite video; phono stereo audio; optical and coaxial

Chipset: Sigma Designs SMP8643, 667MHz CPU

Interface: 2 x USB 2.0 (front); 2 x USB 2.0 host (rear); 2 x SATA

Dimensions: 425(w) x 290(d) x 80(h)mm

Weight: 3.7kg

Also featuring: Ethernet 10/100; Blu-ray ready; IR remote control



are feeds to most of the familiar US-centric attractions (CNN, CBS) alongside TV treats less well travelled, such as the output of Revision 3, The Onion and more.

When it comes to file playback, there's little audio-visual fare the C-200 can't playback. Video containers like MKV, MOV H.264, AVI and MPEG transport streams and VOBs are supported, and there are decoders for most MPEG flavours and WMVs. Playback is astonishingly stable. Sonically, it's equally happy with AAC, MP3, and OGG. Hi-res FLAC audio file support is available although it can be problematic. With the latest firmware I could play FLACs resident on the HDD, but not from a network location. A shame as audio jitter is low, meaning this unit will not disgrace itself in a high-end system.

To help you acquire AV content, there's a P2P utility as well as a Usenet downloader. The former is part of the web interface and relatively straightforward to use, but the latter is treated more like an Easter Egg than a regular feature. Most folk will probably not bother, concluding that it takes too much effort/online research. At least the C-200 also communicates itself across your network with aplomb. It is DLNA/UPnP/Samba/Bonjour compliant, and so should turn up on anything you have connected – from PCs to games consoles.

The best form of flattery: Popcorn Hour has styled its C-200 to look like your other AV components

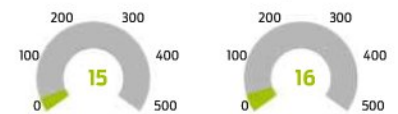
However, while audio support is reasonably extensive, the C-200 would not be my first choice as a music jukebox. There's no visualiser function (essential if you're not to burn your plasma display), probably because it doesn't have the graphical horsepower to generate one, and search facilities are limited and slow.

In use, the unit is a tad less slick than its predecessors. **The simple graphical structure of previous NMTs has been replaced with a crude-looking circular menu** that rather clumsily shuttles around. Many users will want to skin the device with a third-party theme sooner rather than later. Also, my resident HDX box is much faster to respond to commands. This may be due to the IR remote, which has trouble imparting commands if it's not shoved right up the C-200's nose.

Staring at the space the Popcorn Hour C-200 takes up in my rack, I kind of think things have moved on. NAS/streaming solutions are moving into the mainstream and are beginning to appear with better interfaces and documentation. Perhaps there are users out there who appreciate the battlefield build of the new model, and enjoy the fact that it is more a hobby project than consumer device, but I suspect that in this case, bigger has not proved to be better.

Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: As you would expect, the C-200 is a low power consumer

Playing: Little difference in energy use even when streaming

Audio Jitter: Ps



Sound: An astonishingly good audio jitter performance – almost audiophile quality

Video Jitter: Ns



Vision: A four nanosecond video jitter figure is highly creditable for this kind of hybrid unit



HCC VERDICT

Popcorn Hour C-200
£300 Approx

Highs: Versatile; wide file support; internet TV access; great community support

Lows: Clumsy interface; poor documentation; cranky Flac audio; bulky

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Future of TV

LG's use of LED technology means the SL9000 series offers a peerless viewing experience

LG's new SL9000 Series TVs offer the thinnest sets and clearest picture, and they are incredibly energy-efficient.

The stylish SL9000, with its unique flush-fitting screen and dazzling LED backlighting, is only 29.3mm thick, yet still manages to provide astounding picture quality with a 3,000,000:1 contrast ratio. It's also efficient enough to shave up to 40 per cent off your energy bill.

Thanks to LG's ground-breaking LED technology and innovative design, the SL9000 series has been allowed to slim down and swap the restricting frame for a seamless single layer of glass, which fits flush just like an infinity swimming pool.

There are 42in and 47in models available, both of which come fully equipped with four HDMI ports to hook up your Blu-ray player and other devices. There's even Bluetooth compatibility, to wirelessly beam your latest snaps and music to the full-HD 1080p screen.

In short, this is the ultimate hi-def experience for your home. Brilliant.

The details

A Frameless design

The SL9000's unique, single-layer design virtually eliminates the space between the screen and bezel, for a seamless look

B Ultra-slim

LEDs around the perimeter of the frame enable the SL9000 to be just 29.3mm thick

C Entertainment hub

With four HDMI ports, USB (with HD Movie playback), Bluetooth and PC input, you can connect the SL9000 to all your media

D Picture perfect

With a contrast ratio of 3,000,000:1, the SL9000 delivers ultra-crisp images and deeper blacks

E Power saver

LG LED technology saves you up to 40 per cent on your energy bills and the SL9000 is also certified by the Energy Saving Trust

The LG TV Buyers Guide

LG offers so many cutting-edge TV technologies, from integrated Freesat HD tuners bringing subscription-free hi-def channels to picture-enhancing 100Hz processing, that choosing the perfect set could be a little daunting. Don't panic, our simple step-by-step online guide will help you find your ideal LG TV in just a few quick clicks.

www.lge.co.uk/tvguide

Clash of the Titans!

AQUOS

THE CONTENDERS

NEW

PANASONIC TX-P50V10B
£1,500 Approx
Panasonic's plasma panel boasts an integrated
Freesat HD tuner

NEW

SAMSUNG PS50B650
£1,500 Approx
Samsung's slim, web-enabled plasma TV comes
with a raft of online content

SHARP LC-52LE700
£1,700 Approx
Sharp's LCD panel has the advantage of
LED backlighting

NEW

**SONY
KDL-52Z5500**
£1,400 Approx
Sony's V-Series LCD is
feature-packed and
Ethernet-equipped

High-definition TV looks better the bigger it gets. That's why we asked **Jim Hill** to run the rule over four 50/52in flatscreens to see which brands deliver the goods at this cinematic size

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With the advent of hang-on-the-wall TVs, the average screen size has ballooned upwards, and now that LCD production is at full tilt, the big 50in and 52in sets are growing in number and tumbling in price. So, using the accepted wisdom that bigger is better, we've rounded up the most tempting large-screen sets from four of the biggest players in the industry to see just how much you can get for your mid-price budget. Two are plasma, one is a traditional LCD, and one uses the current tech buzzword, LED backlighting. But which is the most deserving of a place in your living room?

Performance

Panasonic's plasma panels seem to be stepping up to fill the void left by Pioneer, with the brand's NeoPDP technology achieving similarly impressive black levels – and plasma has an inherent advantage over LCD in this area. Fast motion is traditionally handled more smoothly

too, and true enough, with Panasonic's TX-P50V10, I didn't spot any judder or motion artefacts during the audition period.

The Panasonic also managed to impress with its vivid colour palette and an excellent sense of depth and realism. This is certainly the case with HD material and a 1080p24 feed from a Blu-ray player, but it's also true of upscaled standard-def material from the internal tuners. Unsurprisingly, BBC HD shown through the in-built Freesat HD receiver looked the best, filling the screen with a very detailed 1080i image, but the scaler is clearly up to muster as the regular Freeview stations looked fairly stable, too.

What the TX-P50V10 couldn't quite manage were the sparkling whites of the LED-powered Sharp LC-52LE700 or the crunchy detail of Sony's LCD-based 52V5500 panel. Overall, however, it's Panasonic that has achieved the most realistic picture quality – and that might be exactly what you are after.

Sonically, the Panasonic is not the loudest of TVs tested here, but the rigid metal chassis must give the stereo speakers some advantage as there's no vibration at full volume and a surprisingly well-projected soundfield.

Sharp's LED-backlit panel has an altogether punchier picture than the others, with brighter whites, bold colours and, for an LCD panel, very dark blacks. The extra brightness of the LED backlights also makes it look a lot better than the others in bright ambient light. Its contrast levels seem to hold well in the light (as evidenced by an impressive contrast measurement of over 300,000:1 in our Tech Labs), which bodes well for **Sharp's chances on the brightly-lit shelves of Comet and Currys.**

In low lighting though, the contrast is less impressive and the night-time scenes of *3:10 to Yuma* on BD look a little murky. This is where local dimming would have been an advantage, shedding light on the

PANASONIC-TX-P50V10B → £1,500 Approx → www.panasonic.co.uk



In brief

The ace up this Panasonic's sleeve is an integrated Freesat HD tuner that allows access to free high-definition broadcasts straight from the box. What's more, that Ethernet port at the back means that it's compatible with the BBC iPlayer (not yet available as we go to print), which will expand the amount of free content considerably.

Another key feature is the THX badge – a genuine mark of quality that basically means the picture has been calibrated to a certain standard, so that you don't have to.

As a plasma, the V10 manages dark blacks and smooth motion more effortlessly than its LCD panels. A trade off is the higher energy consumption. Others screens in the V10 range include a monster 65in.

Sat-savvy: Panasonic's TX-P50V10B has an in-built Freesat HD tuner

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:
An unsurprisingly enormous power consumption of 539W with our 100IRE pattern is cut slightly in Eco mode to 430W

Test footage:
Power consumption with full volume rates at 520W

Contrast: ratio



Picture: The 'infinite black' contrast claim of over 2,000,000:1 is unmeasurable; in Native mode, the measured figure of around 10,000:1 is more plausible and perfectly good, with high luminance of 91.48fl

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:
Not the widest range or most accurate selection of colour temperature presets, and no manual adjustment parameters provided.
Normal: 6,797K
Warm: 6,305K
Cool: 9,130K

moonlit areas and keeping the shadows dark, but Sharp's range of LED-lit TVs eschews the local dimming tricks of its rivals, in order to achieve a more uniform brightness – and, probably, this affordable price point. By using white LEDs instead of the RGB clusters found on its 2008 flagship TV, the XS1E, the colours on the LC-52LE700 can look a little overblown in bright scenes, too. If you like your colours popping out of the screen, this is the TV for you.

There are quite a few options for tweaking the picture quality, to

PERFORMANCE

Round-up: All these screens offer a reasonable performance, but there are differences; the Sony LCD has the sharpest presentation, but the Panasonic and Samsung plasmas offer better black levels. Sharp's LED-lit 52incher is by far the brightest and punchiest of the quartet, but has the weakest audio

Panasonic TX-P50V10B: 1 2 3 4 5

Samsung PS50B650: 1 2 3 4 5

Sharp LC-52LE700: 1 2 3 4 5

Sony KDL-52Z5500: 1 2 3 4 5

tone down the colour temperature, for instance, and video noise reduction and 100Hz processing, if needed. These last two could be useful for making the Freeview channels look a little sharper, but remember to turn all the processing off again for Blu-ray movies to get a more natural picture.

Audio-wise, I can see why Sharp recommends slinging one of its soundbars underneath this set, as the internal speakers are pathetic. Even at full volume, the sound barely reaches the back of the room. Thankfully, there's an optical digital output at the back so you shouldn't have any problems adding a home cinema system and using this as a monitor.

While Sharp takes much pride in its LED technology, the Sony 52V5500's picture is almost as bright and eye-catching with just standard halogen backlighting. This is partly because the default colour, brightness and sharpness all tend to be pumped up for attracting

attention in the shop, but also because the 1080p LCD screen looks especially detailed with the 3:10 to Yuma Blu-ray.

The Bravia Engine 3 that handles all the video processing seems to have more revs than Sharp's chipset and looks a little less fake with the 200Hz motion processing switched on.

The revealing screen can be a little unforgiving of poor standard-definition sources, but I reckon the upscaling is also better here than on the Sharp, so the Freeview channels from the in-built tuner don't look too messy.

Sony's S-Master speakers are the best of the four contenders here. The speakers themselves take up most of the bottom bar and the digital amplification gives them a sonic edge over the weedier systems of the other three TVs. In practice, this means you'll be able to watch daytime TV without feeling the need to boot up your amplifier and surround speakers.

SAMSUNG PS50B650 → £1,500 Approx → www.samsung.co.uk



In brief

This was the first range of TVs from Samsung to showcase TV widgets, or Media@TV, as it's now called, and it's still one of the better implementations of TV-based web content. On top of the usual YouTube and weather updates available, you can trawl Samsung's own website for useful content, or update your Facebook status if that's your kind of thing.

A wi-fi dongle is available if your Ethernet cable isn't long enough and its networking abilities also enable it to stream content from your PC.

The 6 Series is middle of the road for Samsung, but it looks like a more expensive set thanks to its narrow form and alluring ruby-red bezel. Even the remote control is styled to match. A 63in model is available if your living room is big enough.

Glamour: Samsung's red-tinged bezel gives its plasma screen some allure

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:

Our White 100IRE screen caused the Samsung to suck 358W, but fell to 271W in the power saving mode

Test footage:

With movie footage and full audio, the Samsung's energy use drops considerably

Contrast: ratio



Picture: The contrast ratio measures low, but is fair for a plasma TV. It's no way near Samsung's ludicrous claims, though. Luminance measured 25.3fL

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: None of the range of five CT presets meet the 6,500K ideal, but R/G/B gain and offset are available for perfect adjustment
Cool: 10,116K
Normal: 10,289K
Warm 1: 7,971K
Warm 2: 6,069K
Warm 3: 5,314K

While Samsung's PS50B650 shines in most departments, the screen actually looks a little soft and the colours slightly muted alongside the other sets. But it's by no means a poor picture – Samsung's latest-generation plasma panels seem to have sorted out the black issues and offer much better contrast, allowing this screen to pick out the detail in *3:10 to Yuma*'s dark scenes better than the LCD rivals, particularly when the ambient lighting is low.

In fact, that very slight softness, combined with a reasonable video processor, makes the Freeview channels look more acceptable here than on the Sharp or Sony.

Another great aspect of the Samsung is its user-friendly interface, which makes it easy, and not too time-consuming, to search for and play a YouTube clip or watch a video file from one of the two USB ports.

The 2 x 10W speaker system probably won't have you waking the neighbours, but has decent enough clarity and a wide spread.

Design

It's important to many of us (and our better halves) what our AV hardware looks like even when it's switched off, and this is something that Samsung has grasped fully. Even though this Series 6 plasma will never make shoppers swoon (like its superslim LED panels), there's still been some thought put into the aesthetics, with a rather large, but elegantly curved bezel, made of an almost translucent plastic shot through with just a hint of red. The glass pedestal is equally impressive and **even the remote control is styled to match**. It's also one of the slimmest plasma panels around and it doesn't look too shabby from behind either.

Panasonic's NeoPDP screen is, however, even thinner, and its rugged metal and glass construction inspires confidence. It's an understated design – but for some people, that's going to be preferable to the attention-seeking looks of the Samsung set.

The V-Series Sony isn't the brand's most stylish screen (that accolade probably goes to its Z-Series models) and actually looks a little boxy from the side. It's the fattest panel of this grouptest, too, (at 115mm deep) but is saved by a few design flourishes. The clear plastic window, that is, in fact, mirrored in part, helps to give the impression of a free-hanging speaker bar. The dark, slightly speckled finish is appealing, too.

Sharp's plasticky and plain TV looks a little low-rent, but it does

DESIGN

Round-up: The Samsung and the Panasonic plasma TVs have the most alluring designs, although at different ends of the bling spectrum. The Sharp benefits from its narrow bezel, but don't assume it's skinny just because it's an LED TV. Sony's effort is bland, but inoffensive

Panasonic TX-P50V10B: 1 2 3 4 5
 Samsung PS50B650: 1 2 3 4 5
 Sharp LC-52LE700: 1 2 3 4 5
 Sony KDL-52V5500 1 2 3 4 5

SHARP LC-52LE700 → £1,700 Approx → www.sharp.co.uk



In brief

Sharp was there at the forefront of LCD development and here it is again with the first affordable LED backlit bigscreen. The trick has been to use plain white LEDs instead of red, green and blue diodes and eschew local dimming in favour of a uniform array. The result is a bright, colourful and contrast-rich picture and impressively low power consumption..

Aside from the striking screen, Sharp's panel comes with a smattering of features, including a USB port, but no Ethernet connection. In fact, the LC-52LE700 is the only model in this grouptest not to offer some form of online interactivity or widgets.

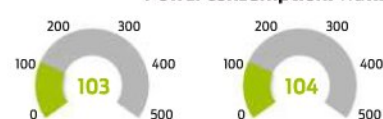
There are also 32in, 40in and 46in versions of the LE700 model available.

Decision time:

Sharp's LC-52LE700 features LED backlighting, but no online capability. Which is more important to you?

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



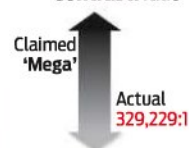
White screen:

The Sharp offers low energy consumption, as you would expect from LED backlighting. Eco Mode and Energy Save cut consumption to 68W

Test footage:

There's a very small increase in power consumption with volume at full levels

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Strong contrast performance as expected, and a capable brightness of 79.68fl

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:

Very flexible six-stage manual gain and saturation parameters add to a fair selection of colour temperature presets
 Low: 6,859
 Mid-low: 8,285
 Middle: 9,331
 Mid-high: 10,274
 High: 11,274

have the narrowest bezel, which puts the emphasis, appropriately, on the picture itself. At 95mm it's not exactly thin, either, but the bulk is accounted for by the white LED backlight array.

Features

To keep this group test fair, we've chosen 50/52in screens from each of the brand's mid-priced lines, and it's thrown up some interesting features including TV widgets and media streaming, but none of the really high-end luxuries, like Wi-Fi or wireless HDMI connectivity. In terms of connectivity, there's little separating the screens. Each packs four HDMI inputs, a PC input and the usual analogue fallbacks.

With its integrated Freesat HD tuner, the Panasonic TX-P50V10 wins the prize for the most bells and whistles, as this defining feature comes on top of an SD card slot, AVCHD video playback, THX mode and Viera Cast. The latter refers to Panasonic's internet TV offering,

putting bite-size morsels of web content on the screen around the picture. Easy YouTube access is perhaps the most entertaining of these. The Panny also allows media streaming from a PC if it's hooked up to the same network.

Samsung's PS50B650B lacks a built-in Freesat HD tuner and THX certification but otherwise matches Panasonic feature-wise, and its web solution, co-developed with Yahoo!, is rather better. Samsung was first to market with

FEATURES

Round-up: Despite not being flagship models, the Panasonic, Samsung and Sony TVs all offer some form of internet TV, although Sony's iteration in its current state is pretty pointless. The Sharp is the odd one in this respect, though you may value its low power consumption more

Panasonic TX-P50V10B: 1 2 3 4 5
 Samsung PS50B650: 1 2 3 4 5
 Sharp LC-52LE700: 1 2 3 4 5
 Sony KDL-52Z5500: 1 2 3 4 5

this kind of internet-enabled TV and has since released a few more widgets, like Twitter, that early adopters have been able to add to their widget libraries.

Sony's V-Series sets aren't quite as laden with goodies as its premium lines, but it does offer AppliCast, Sony's take on TV widgets (and not a very effective one, it has to be said) and the ability to stream media from a PC on the network. There's a USB port, but no MemoryStick slot, which is odd, seeing as it's Sony's own proprietary storage format.

Sharp's LC-52LE700 doesn't feature anything in the way of online interactivity – the best you get is JPEG and MP3 playback via USB. In fact, Sharp seems to have blown its budget on the LED backlighting, which will probably get a nod of approval from the AV purists. It's surprising to see LEDs being used at this modest price point, and could be a sign of things to come – especially considering their low energy use.

SONY KDL-52V5500 → £1,400 Approx → www.sony.co.uk



In brief

Sony's V Series occupies quite a lowly position in the Bravia hierarchy, and despite the smart finish and attractive transparent detailing, it's not as slim, or stylish as the W, E, Z or X Series. What it does have is a strong feature set including internet connectivity for Sony's AppliCast widget system and media streaming.

There's no Freesat tuner on this model sadly – you'll need to look for the new KDL-52V5810 for that, but the user interface is superb and accessing the regular Freeview channels is especially easy with Sony's intuitive remote.

The brand also makes 32in, 37in, 40 and 46in V-Series LCDs should you not have room for this 52in iteration.

Media mogul:

Sony's V-Series Bravia offers the brand's AppliCast net-TV feature and media streaming

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:

A relatively high level of power consumption, but Eco Mode cuts it to just 74W

Test footage:

A very small increase in consumption with full volume and movie footage

Contrast: ratio



Colour temp: Kelvin



Picture: Good contrast ratio, gratifyingly close to the claimed figure, and brightness is relatively high at 96.34fl.

Presets:

A fair range of colour temperature presets, and basic manual colour balance is also available.
 Neutral: 8,902
 Warm 1: 7,788
 Warm 2: 6,430
 Cool: 11,067

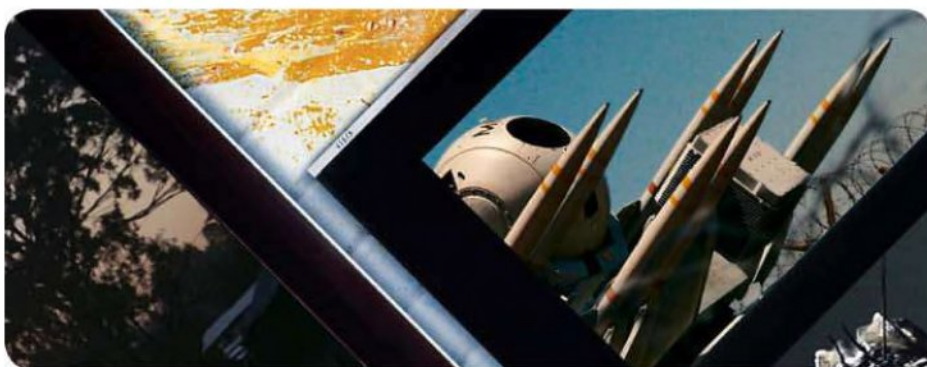
Final standings

If our grouptest proves one thing, it's that you can get a lot more screen inches for your buck these days and that could be driven by LCD, plasma, or LED technology.

At first glance, it looks like Samsung is offering the most here and leading the way in terms of slick styling and extended connectivity. Its picture quality is fine too, but is the least remarkable of the bunch and the sound from the tiny speakers doesn't quite match the scale of the screen. With our emphasis on performance, Samsung's set doesn't quite cut it.

Sony's V-Series panel has an impressively detailed picture that loves Blu-ray, with its consistent colours and decent audio performance from the S-Master speakers putting on a good show. The AppliCast feature is weak, though.

LED is the buzzword at the moment and Sharp's backlighting version has its



advantages. The screen is brighter, revealing brilliant whites and vivid colours, and the energy saving is considerable over time. It's not the best LED application we've seen, though, and the plain styling and feeble speakers keep it off the number one slot.

It's the THX-toting, Freesat HD-packing Panasonic that takes the prize this time.

Proving that plasma still has an edge at this screen size, the Panasonic manages the blackest blacks and most natural motion. Sure, it doesn't look quite as good in full sunlight as the LED panel and Sony's LCD TV looks a little sharper, but for home cinema duties, this is the set that can deliver the most cinematic experience ●



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-P50V10B
£1,500 Approx

Highs: Deep blacks; natural colours; Freesat and BBC iPlayer ready; THX certified
Lows: Reflective screen; no USB port

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Screen: 50in plasma

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

TV tuner: Analogue, Freeview

and Freesat HD

Connections: 4 x HDMI; 2 x Scart

(both RGB); component;

composite; S-video, optical

digital audio output; D-Sub

PC input

Audio: 2 x 10W

Dimensions (W/O stand): 1,241(w) x

774(h) x 83.5(d)mm

Weight: 34kg

Features: 600Hz subfield drive;

THX certification; Ethernet for

VieraCast and DLNA-certified

media streaming



HCC VERDICT

Sharp LC-52LE700
£1,700 Approx

Highs: Dazzling whites; vivid colours; energy efficient
Lows: Plain frame design; poor video processing; feeble speakers

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Screen: 52in LCD (Full LED

backlighting)

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

TV tuner: Analogue, Freeview

Connections: 4 x HDMI; 2 x Scart

(one RGB); component;

composite; optical digital audio

output; D-Sub PC input

Audio: 2 x 10W

Dimensions (W/O stand): 1,240(w)

x 820(h) x 95(d)mm

Weight: 27.6kg

Features: 100Hz mode; USB

input for media file playback



HCC VERDICT

Sony KDL-52V5500
£1,400 Approx

Highs: Pin-sharp picture; bold colours; excellent GUI and remote; good upscaling
Lows: Bulky frame; limited AppliCast content

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Screen: 52in LCD

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

TV tuner: Analogue, Freeview

Connections: 4 x HDMI; 2 x Scart

(both RGB); component;

composite; optical digital audio

output; D-Sub PC input

Audio: 2 x 10W stereo

Dimensions (W/O stand): 1,262(w)

x 822(h) x 115(d)mm

Weight: 30.5kg

Features: USB input for media

file playback; Ethernet for

AppliCast web content and

DLNA streaming;

XrossMediaBar GUI



HCC VERDICT

Samsung PS50B650
£1,500 Approx

Highs: Stylish design; useful internet content; great connectivity; good value
Lows: Slightly soft picture; quiet speakers

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Screen: 50in plasma

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

TV tuner: Analogue, Freeview

Connections: 4 x HDMI; 2 x Scart

(both RGB); component;

composite; optical digital

audio output; D-Sub PC input

Audio: 2 x 10W stereo

Dimensions (W/O stand): 1,231(w)

x 756(h) x 290(d)mm

Weight: 38.2kg

Features: 100Hz mode; 2 x USB

input for media file playback;

Ethernet to access Yahoo

Widgets and DLNA media

streaming

23 individual stores across the UK

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basingstoke@audio-t.co.uk

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www.audio-t.co.uk

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www.freedowns.net

How we test

Home Cinema Choice's hardware reviews combine the subjective opinion of our seasoned reviewers with hard technical data.

Chris Jenkins explains how the HCC Tech Labs work

HCC reviews tend to be a mixture of subjective opinion and objective data. While we value the subjective opinions of our highly experienced reviews team, we like to blend and balance their opinions with objective measurements. The HCC Tech Labs have been measuring AV equipment for nearly 20 years. It was originally conceived to evaluate the performance of VCRs and CRT TVs, and it is now routinely testing Blu-ray players and HD displays.

Interestingly, much of our first generation hardware is still in use (we maintain an irrational fondness for an oscilloscope used to determine the onset of clipping on amplifiers), although our more venerable hardware is now supplemented by new software and measurement methodologies. One thing remains unchanged though: our commitment to supply you with the best possible buying advice.

Virtual Tour

Our Tech Labs consist of two main facilities: a Viewing Room, and a Test Lab.

The Viewing Room is used mainly for testing TVs, projectors and speakers and has been designed to reproduce the conditions that are found in a typical mid-range home cinema setup. It was created by award-winning custom installers Pounds (www.poundstv.co.uk), and is completely light-proofed. While it is not designed to be sound-proof, it has been skinned in Acoustiblock and has been acoustically treated and tuned by the experts at RPG (www.rpg-europe.co.uk), using custom absorbers and diffusers. The room features multiple HDMI, component video and audio cable runs, as well as analogue and digital TV and satellite feeds, and has a resident 7.2

speaker system. Multiple screens can be fed the same source material simultaneously, courtesy of a Gefen 2-in-4-out HDMI switcher/splitter, for screen shootouts.

Number crunching

The Test Lab is used mainly for number-crunching DVD/Blu-ray players and amplifiers. It's equipped with two industry-standard systems: a Tektronix VM700 video data analyser, and an Audio Precision APX585 multichannel audio analyser. Using standard test signals from discs and signal generators, these two systems are used to measure factors such as audio and video signal jitter, frequency response and output power. These give us a good general idea of the component quality, processing power and overall performance of players and amplifiers.

Professionals at large

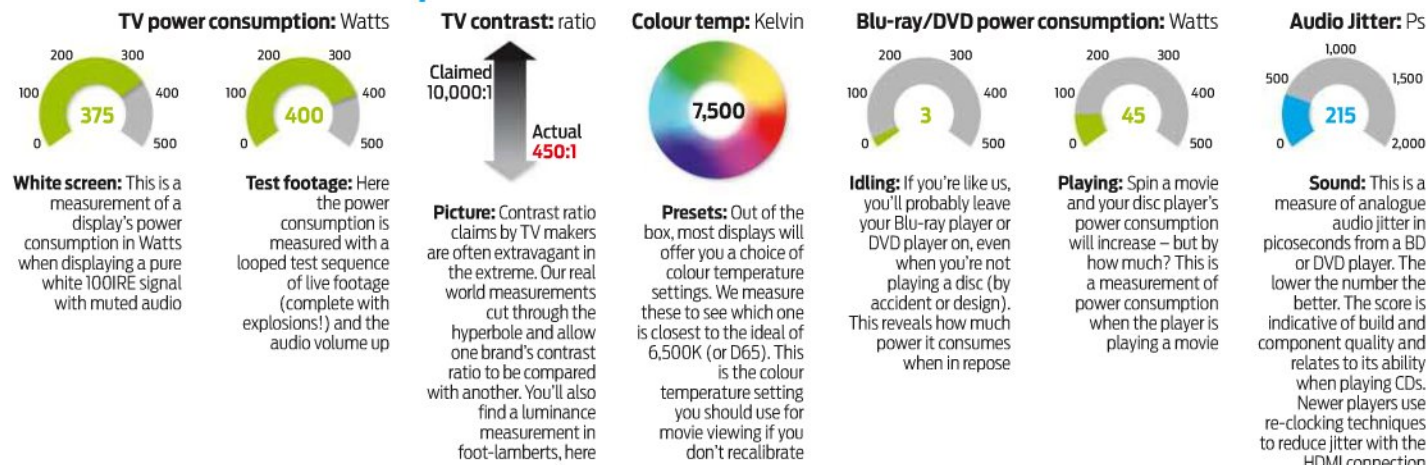
Over the years, our testers have been trained in calibration and testing techniques by the ISF, Tektronix, the Home Acoustics Alliance and other industry bodies. In short, when you read a review in HCC, you can be sure that the reviewer's subjective opinion is backed up by objective scientific lab testing.

Understandable and useful

One of our pledges is to present information that is both understandable and useful, for example, exposing the hype perpetrated by some makers of plasmas and LCD TVs regarding contrast ratios. To determine real world contrast, as well as measuring colour temperature presets, we employ a Sencore VP401 signal generator alongside a PC running Datacolor Colorfacts software with a Spyder 2 sensor. We use the Sencore signal generator and our own discs to generate standard TV



Tech Lab tests explained



**Test bench:**

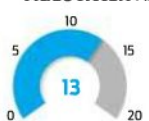
Equipment from the likes of Snell & Wilcox, and Tektronix allows us to compare all manner of kit

signals. Colorfacts analyses the colour and luminance performance of TVs and projectors, giving us information in areas such as contrast ratio, colour temperature and luminance.

Playback

Increasingly, you've been asking for more information on power consumption, and so we've now moved these

results to a headline position on our tests. We've also developed a more graphical presentation (key below) of some of the data we produce, which should make the facts more relevant and digestible. Not all the data we generate is published (frankly, you'd be bored) but all of it goes into the melting pot of opinion. While one key reviewer is bylined for our tests, as many as four team players will contribute to our findings ●

Video Jitter: Ns

Vision: This is a measure of video jitter in nanoseconds from a BD or DVD player. The lower the number the better. The score is indicative of build and component quality. We also present figures for Chroma Crosstalk (another quality indicator) and frequency response @5.8MHz

Loading: Boot/Java

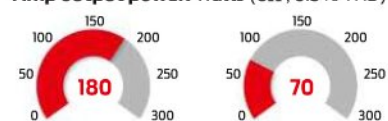
Boot speed & tray eject



Disc loading & Java: Blu-ray players can be notoriously slow to load and play discs, thanks to the DRM and Java content of BD software. These timings are crucial to the user experience – naturally faster is best

AVR power: Watts

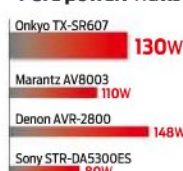
Powered: When you fire up that big AV receiver to watch a new movie you may be surprised to learn just how much current it's drawing. This is one of two measurements we take for AV amp power consumption. The other is when the AVR is powered up but idle

Amp output power: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)

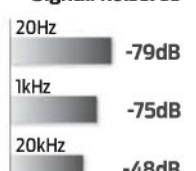
2-channel 8Ω: So just how heroic is that AVR you've been saving for? Putting aside paper claims, we measure its output in two-channel stereo mode. Also noted here is a figure for Total Harmonic Distortion



5-channel 8Ω: In most cases, an amplifier's muscle will be diminished when it runs in multichannel mode. We push the product to extremes in a 5.1 configuration to see how much grunt is available with all channels driven

Pure power: Watts

Fidelity firewall: This is our measurement of power untainted by distortion (typically 0.052THD, 8Ω, 1kHz). It's an indicator of both power output and component quality

Signal/noise: dB

S/N tests: These amp measurements reveal the ratio of noise to signal at a specific frequency. Readings taken at low, mid and high points help determine imaging clarity and sonic character

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PLAYBACK

→ **Software highlights** **INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS** Tarantino takes on WW2 **TAKING OF PELHAM 1 2 3** Travolta struts his stuff on the New York subway **HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE** More HD wizard adventures **FUNNY PEOPLE** Adam Sandler and Seth Rogen aim for laughs **SUSPIRIA** Classic horror makes a killer Blu-ray **AND MUCH MORE!**



Red devils

Inglourious Basterds → All-region BD

How does Quentin Tarantino's WW2 thriller shape up as a home cinema experience? Read our verdict on p103

HCC Ratings key

Harry Potter	1 2 3 4 5
Harry Hill	1 2 3 4 5
Harry Henderson	1 2 3 4 5
Hari Kari	1 2 3 4 5
Hairy Cornflake	1 2 3 4 5



Not everyone liked the new
Turner Prize winner



Slumdog spacemen

Does this sci-fi actioner merit all the hype? Er, yes, actually



HCC VERDICT

District 9
Sony Pictures → All-region
BD → £25 Approx

We say: An excellent hi-def
package for a seriously
impressive slice of modern
science-fiction

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

District 9 is the perfect antidote to the glut of brainless blockbusters shoehorned into multiplexes over the Summer. This dynamic sci-fi allegory about an alien race forced to live in South African slums is not perfect (the less said about the role of Nigerians, the better), but it has more brains and imagination than most mainstream fare, and mixes it with special effects and action that belies the modest \$30 million budget.

Mark Craven: Kudos to Sony Pictures for doing such a great job with *District 9*'s visuals on Blu-ray, considering the variety of source material.

The first act plays out in faux-documentary style, mixing archive news footage with home movies, CCTV material and handheld HD video, with the filmmakers using the likes of Sony's EX1 'prosumer' camcorder and much more expensive 4K Red cameras to capture the action. All this is handled with ease – the only flaws coming from the source, rather than technical issues with the AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode. When the film begins its shift to a more traditionally cinematic experience around Chapter 8, the image quality begins to shine, and by the time the Mech suit is stomping around in Chapter 14 you'll be agog at the fine detail and sense of depth in the image.

Steve May: Like the movie, the audio for *D-9* is deceptively conventional. What opens with a mockumentary aesthetic effortlessly transforms into a full-blown action orchestration with shades of Xbox FPS. A dynamic DTS-HD MA 5.1 presentation reveals subtle, imaginative touches, and hard-edged weapons fire. The futuristic hardware sounds are fun, fresh and exciting, and the LFE when the prawn mothership comes to life is a treat. Throw in Clinton Shorter's score, which is mostly an admirable exercise in restraint, and you have a winner. And if the final Mech shootout doesn't become a demo fave, I'll eat a can of Whiskas.

Anton van Beek: While there's nothing original, *District 9* offers considered and informative extras. Director/co-writer Neil Blomkamp provides an enthusiastic chat-track along with an informative 35min *Making of...* documentary. Also included are four featurettes looking at the makeup effects, digital VFX, production design and acting. Rounding things off are 22 deleted scenes, Cinechat and MovieIQ functions, a BD-Live link and an interactive map with schematics and info on the locations, weapons and creatures. It also offers a v3.01 firmware update for PS3 users.



Life

2 Entertain Ltd → All-region BD
£50 Approx



After four years and 3,000 days of filming, *Life* is the latest David Attenborough series from the

BBC's Natural History Unit and maintains the high standards set by *Blue Planet* and *Plant Earth*. Shot in hi-def, the 10 episodes looks spectacular on Blu-ray. The native 1080i 1.78:1 visuals (presented as VC-1 encodes) are packed with eye-popping detail and stunning colours, although it's disappointing to get only DTS-HD HR 5.1 audio rather than truly lossless mixes. Each episode come with a *Life Diary* highlighting particular challenges faced during the shoot. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Funny People: 2-Disc CE

Universal Pictures → Region 2 DVD
£20 Approx



Despite the title and the presence of Adam Sandler and Seth Rogen, Judd Apatow's third

directorial outing isn't very funny. It is a rather touching look at relationships and people dealing with their mortality. It's great for around 90 minutes, but there's still another 50mins to go, which takes the film in a new, unsatisfying, direction. Both the anamorphic 1.85:1 transfer and DD5.1 audio are pleasing, if unspectacular. Plentiful extras include a commentary, gag reels, 75min doc, footage of Rogen and Sandler doing stand-up and more. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Dorian Gray

Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Oscar Wilde's novel gets a timely makeover courtesy of director Oliver Parker in this glossy flick.

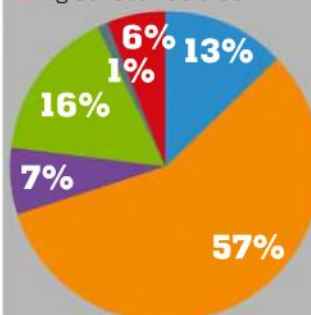
Ben Barnes excels as Dorian, shifting from naïve newcomer to corrupted beauty with deftness, while Parker does a superb job of conjuring up a Gothic turn-of-the-century London. The VC-1 1.85:1 encode is as beautiful as Dorian, packed with subtle textures and rich colours, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is suitably atmospheric (especially in the creepy attic scenes). Extras take the form of a commentary, five deleted scenes, a *Making of...*, a blooper reel and five mini featurettes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

We asked you...

Which of the following is Quentin Tarantino's best directorial outing?

- Reservoir Dogs
- Pulp Fiction ■ Jackie Brown
- Kill Bill Vol. 1 & 2
- Death Proof
- Inglourious Basterds



Results of poll from
www.homecinemachoice.com

Harry Plodder

Hormones pose the latest threat to the teenage wizard

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

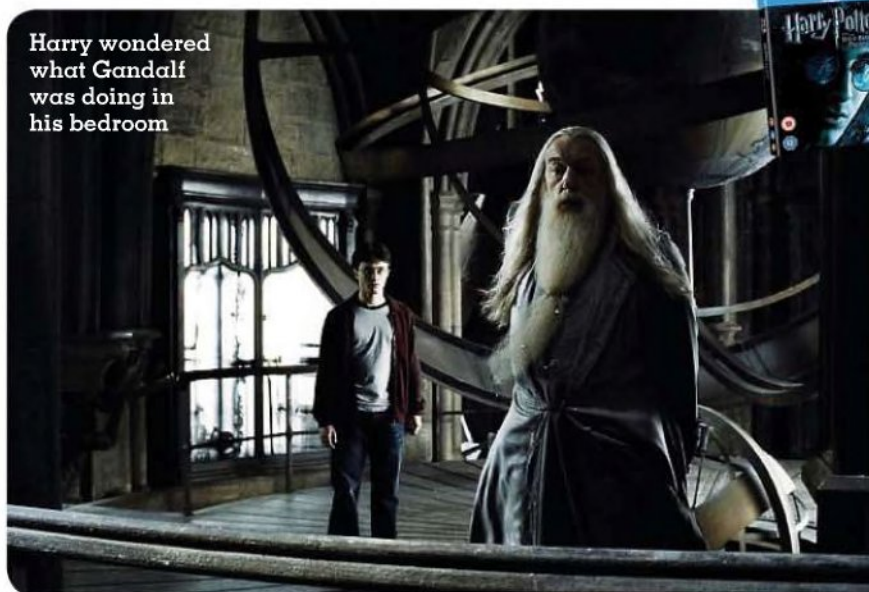
finds the magical franchise continue to spin its wheels a bit in the build-up to the epic (two-part) cinematic finale. Instead of grand battles against the forces of evil, Harry and chums find themselves caught up in yet more intrigue at Hogwarts and, gulp, dealing with hormones and the opposite sex! There's a sense of growing maturity in this flick but – except for one major death and revelations about Voldemort – there's little that adds to the ongoing story.

Mark Craven: Warner has definitely worked some magic with this HD release of the *Half-Blood Prince*. Right from the opening destruction of the Millennium Bridge, the VC-1 2.40:1 encode reveals a wealth of detailing and sharpness. Colours are slightly harder to judge, simply because (outside of a couple of visits to the Quidditch pitch) the film opts for a deliberately desaturated palette that reflects the darker nature of the story, but during those odd moments of bright colour there's a clear vibrancy to the visuals.

Rik Henderson: *Harry Potter* is Warner's golden goose, so it was highly unlikely that its Dolby TrueHD 5.1 sound mix was going to be anything other than spectacular. I didn't expect it to be demo disc-worthy, though.

The three-minute opening sequence, for example, is a veritable carnival of spatial effects, punctuated with growling LFE and explosive use of the front-left and -right channels. When combined with Brit composer Nicholas Hooper's dark, rumbling, foreboding score, you get an amazing audio experience that could've been lifted from a horror movie.

Harry wondered what Gandalf was doing in his bedroom



It sets the tone superbly – this is no normal kids' flick.

Anton van Beek: While this latest ...*Potter* release features the best extras from the franchise yet, it still feels thin when compared to other blockbusters. Joining the film on Disc One is a Maximum Movie Mode, but it's a rather disappointing one – lacking the onscreen directorial input of previous outings, and proving extremely thinly-spaced across the film. There are also 14 *Focus Point* featurettes that can be linked to from the MMM or accessed directly from the Special Features menu, plus a BD-Live link.

The second disc houses a collection of eight behind-the-scenes featurettes, short Q&A pieces with the cast, eight deleted scenes and a look at the creation of the Harry Potter attraction at the Universal Orlando Resort. However, the pick of the bunch is a 50min documentary about JK Rowling, which delivers the kind of incisive material fans have been wanting for years. Also included in the set are DVD and Digital Copy versions.



HCC VERDICT

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince → Warner Home Video
All-region BD → £29 Approx

We say: Potter's latest outing looks and sounds great in HD, but lacks a little magic when it comes to story and extras

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Saturday night seizure

Travolta takes on Washington in Tony Scott's remake of the '70s favourite

The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3

finds newly-crowned Home Cinema Hero Denzel Washington (see page 30) teaming up with John Travolta and director Tony Scott for a remake of the 1974 fan favourite. Washington plays the mild-mannered New York transit dispatcher who ends up being the unwilling contact for Travolta's armed hijacker, when he takes a subway car and its passengers hostage. Meanwhile Scott's trademark stylistic ticks do a good job of adding pace and verve to what is ultimately a fairly predictable thriller that thrives on dialogue rather than action.

Mark Craven: Sony Pictures' BD transfer of *Taking of Pelham 1 2 3* is solid, but not spectacular – a bit like the film itself. There are moments, particularly the outdoor scenes in New York City, where the 1080p AVC encode is a real thing of beauty, with razor-sharp edges, oodles of fine detail and no signs of print damage or coding errors. Yet in the gloomily-lit subway sequences, I noticed occasional shots riddled with noise, and the muted colour palette – while very much a by-product of filming on location underground – can get a little tiring.

Steve May: With captions that whoosh, a bitchin' music beat and full-on popcorn movie histrionics – this high-gloss remake works hard to be a guaranteed AV crowd-pleaser. Harry Gregson-Williams (who did a similarly effective job on *XMO: Wolverine*) delivers a pitch perfect score – you may not remember it the day after tomorrow but I'm sure you'll enjoy it while it's happening – while sound designer Sean McCormack has great fun with the pressure-cooker ingredients. Aural FX are racked-up to the



max for the DTS-HD MA mix and every inch of the 5.1 soundfield is flexed like an NYC pole dancer. This is one ride that is definitely worth taking.

Anton van Beek: Tony Scott's remake embarks on its Blu-ray outing with a satisfying collection of extras. To highlight the challenges involved in getting the film made, there's a pair of insightful audio commentaries (the first a solo effort by the director, the second pairing writer Brian Helgeland with producer Todd Black), ably assisted by the 30 minute *No Time to Lose: The Making of Pelham 1 2 3* documentary and a 15 minute look at the New York underground. The disc also offers up a featurette on haircuts (no, honestly), a reel of trailers, a BD-Live Link and Sony's Cinechat and MovieIQ functionality.

HCC VERDICT

The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3 → Sony Pictures
All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: A solid, if unspectacular remake, whose biggest thrills come from its AV performance

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Powder Blue

Momentum Pictures → R2 DVD
£16 Approx



You don't often come across a straight-to-DVD release with a cast this strong. So why does a film starring Jessica Biel, Forest Whittaker, Patrick Swayze, Ray Liotta, Lisa Kudrow and Kris Kristofferson bypass cinemas? Maybe because it's one of those predictable *Magnolia* and *Crash*-inspired ensemble pieces. It's no classic, but worth a look – especially if you want to see Ms Biel as a stripper.

Momentum's colour-rich 2.35:1 anamorphic transfer and DD5.1 mix ensure the DVD looks and sounds good, and there's also the trailer and a short 17-minute featurette on hand. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Mesrine: Parts 1&2

Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£30 Approx



Bringing together director Jean-Francois Richet's two movies about French gangster Jacques

Mesrine (*Killer Instinct* and *Public Enemy No. 1*), this is a treat for crime film fans. Vincent Cassel gives a beguiling performance as Mesrine, while Richet ensures the action and story are stylish and pacy. Both films fit on one BD50 (246mins of HD video), alongside lossless DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio in French and 163mins of SD extras. This affects the 1080p images with some compression artefacts taking the shine from otherwise impressive VC-1 2.40:1 encodes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Sopranos: S1

HBO Video → All-region BD
£50 Approx



David Chase's drama will go down as not just a modern TV classic, but also the series that launched

HBO into the hearts of critics and audiences. This 5-disc BD boxset is the perfect excuse to revisit the first 13 episodes and they still resonate – even after multiple viewings. Unfortunately, the AVC 1.78:1 encodes aren't quite as impressive as the show itself. While a clear upgrade from the DVD, the picture sometimes looks noisy and over-processed. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is pleasingly enveloping at times. Sadly, there are no new extras, just the thin batch that came with the DVDs. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Collision

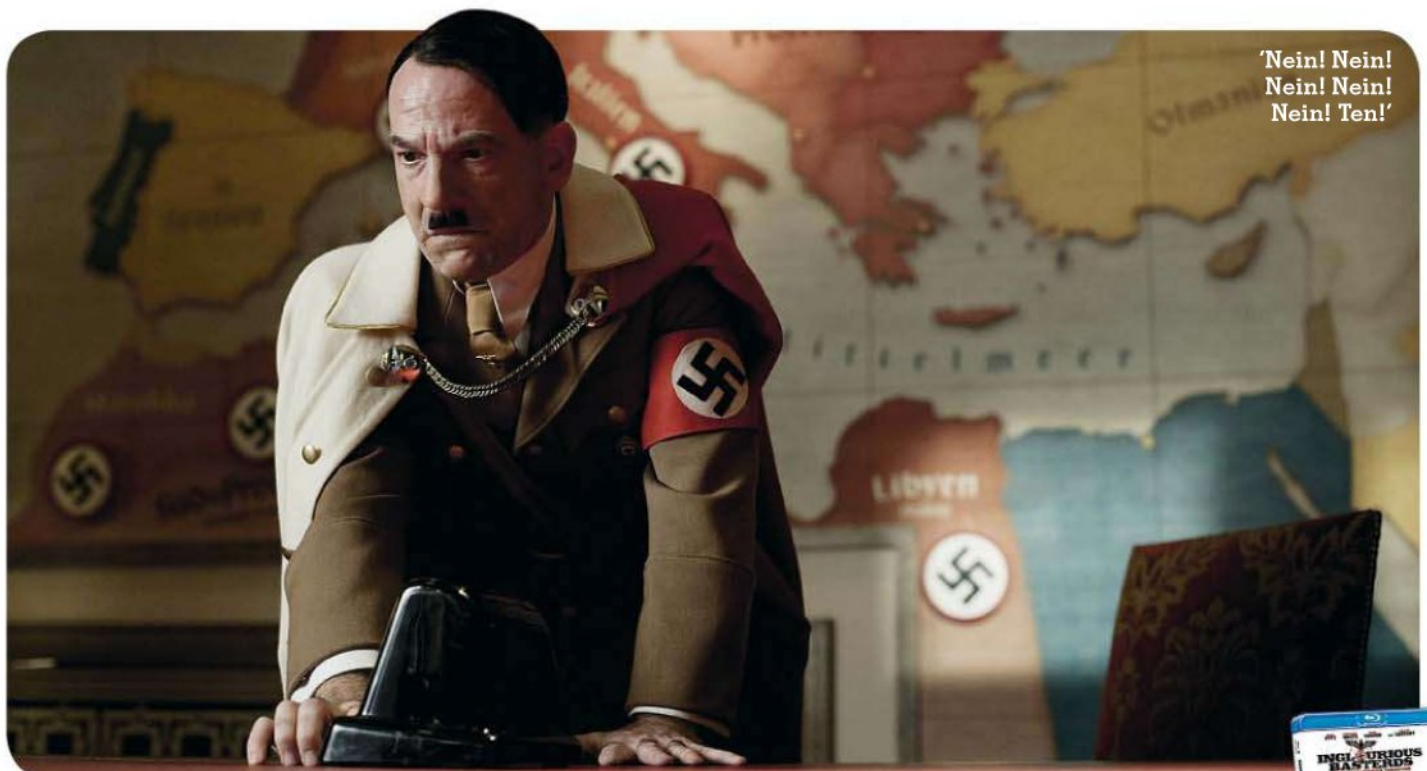
4DVD → Region 2 DVD
£20 Approx



First screened on five consecutive nights on TV, this ITV mini series tells the stories of a group of

strangers whose lives become entwined after a devastating road accident. *Primeval*'s Douglas Henshall is the policeman investigating the crash, who discovers there's more to the incident than meets the eye, and the story veers into embezzlement, government cover-ups and murder. It's well served by this two-disc release's anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer and Dolby 2.0 soundtrack. Extras comprise commentaries for the first two episodes and an 18-minute behind-the-scenes featurette. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5



'Nein! Nein!
Nein! Nein!
Nein! Ten!'

Revenge of the nerd

Quentin Tarantino goes for the jugular with this misspelt WWII yarn

Inglourious Basterds

is like Marmite – you'll either love it or hate it.

After the cosy team up with Robert Rodriguez for *Grindhouse*, fanboy favourite Quentin Tarantino steps out of his comfort zone for a dip into World War II. The result isn't quite what anybody expected. Part '70s-style exploitation flick, part arthouse thriller, *Inglourious Basterds'* ultimate failing is an inability to bring these two disparate elements together in a satisfactory manner. However, fans of Tarantino's colourful dialogue, larger-than-life characters and cinephile posturing will find plenty to enjoy, and there's no denying that the whole thing looks absolutely stunning.

Mark Craven: Universal Pictures has taken the *Basterds'* bloodstained baseball bat and hit a home run with this spectacular AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode.

Detailing is top-notch, colour reproduction is faithful to the source material (in other words, deliberately rather muted, save for bright reds) and black levels are deep and dark. Couple this with a pristine source print and no technical issues with the Blu-ray encode itself, and you have a truly crowd-pleasing image.

Steve May: If there's one element of a Quentin Tarantino soundtrack likely to dominate it is dialogue – and *Inglourious Basterds* has plenty. Thankfully, for the most part, every lovingly crafted word is clean and articulate. Your centre speaker is

certain to feel loved. Predictably, the use of music is as eclectic as ever. The spitchy main theme will have you reaching to turn down the volume, but stick with it. Ennio Morricone, Lalo Schiffrin, Charles Bernstein all feature... the result is a ribald romp through the B-movie-music back catalogue. There's not a massive amount of rear channel action in the DTS HD MA 5.1 mix, but then that's not why you watch a QT movie, is it?

Anton van Beek: It's always annoying that somebody so eager to talk about other people's films is so unwilling to record audio commentaries for his own – but Quentin don't do 'em, and *Inglourious Basterds* is no different in this regard.

Sadly, while this Blu-ray disc offers up a fair variety of extras, beyond a 31-minute roundtable discussion with Tarantino and Brad Pitt, there's no in-depth look at the making of the film that might work in place of a commentary. All you get are: three extended/alternate scenes; the full cut of the film-within-a-film *Nation's Pride*; a tongue-in-cheek featurette about the making of said propaganda piece; a look back at the original Italian film *The Inglourious Basterds*; an interview and anecdote from actor Rod Taylor; a montage of clapperboard moments; a look at the film posters used in the film; a gallery of *Inglourious Basterds* promo posters; an interactive trivia challenge; a trio of trailers; and the usual My Scenes functionality and What's New! BD-Live link.



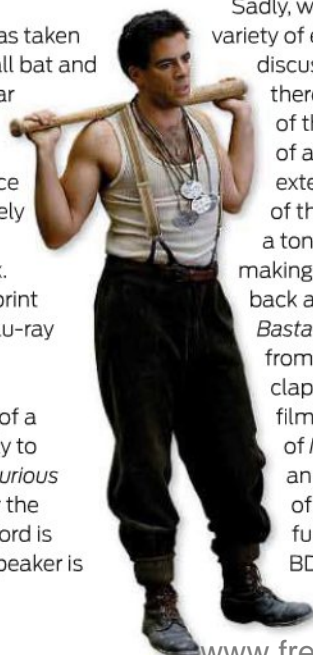
HCC VERDICT

Inglourious Basterds
Universal Pictures
All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: The *Basterds* look great in hi-def, but both the film and the BD pack have shortcomings.

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



AntichristArtificial Eye → Region B BD
£20 Approx

Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier likes courting controversy, and he's done so with this beautiful and

terrifying venture. A couple's son dies tragically, so they head off to a woodland cabin to work through their grief. But von Trier keeps peeling back layers, exploring (often unpalatable) themes and exposes us to shocking violence. The native 1080i visuals look incredible thanks to the AVC 1.78:1 encode, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix handles the dialogue with ease. Extras include a commentary, eight featurettes, Cannes Festival footage, interviews and the trailer. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

A Perfect GetawayMomentum Pictures → Region B BD
£25 Approx

Two pairs of lovers on a Hawaiian hiking holiday discover that killers are murdering tourists on the island.

To say more about David Twohy's dark comedic thriller risks ruining the twists and turns, and that would be a shame – if you can deal with the odd shifting tone, *A Perfect Getaway* is an enjoyable way to waste of an evening. This BD serves up both the 97-minute theatrical and 108-minute Director's cut, both with stunning AVC 2.40:1 encodes and atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Disappointingly, extras are limited to an alternative ending and a dull nine-minute *Making of...* **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Sorority RowE1 Entertainment → Region B BD
£25 Approx

A group of students covering up the accidental death of a colleague become the target of a

vengeful killer in this teen horror. Unlike the *I Know What You Did...* franchise this is more enjoyably mean-spirited slasher cinema, with nasty characters and smart deaths scenes. It's also a sharp-looking hi-def experience with an AVC 2.35:1 encode that renders young flesh well. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is suitably atmospheric, and the surround channels get plenty of use. It's just a shame the extras (commentary, deleted scenes and featurettes) are as shallow as the characters **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Wrong Turn 3: Left for Dead20th Century Fox → R2 DVD
£16 Approx

The mutant-hillbilly horror franchise takes its own wrong turn with this low-budget three-quel. This time

around, a bunch of escaped convicts (including cockney geezer Tamer Hassan as a Latino gangster) are being hunted by Three Finger, the single surviving cannibal mutant. It's cheap, scare-free, and fumbles every death scene with lame CGI.

Fox's anamorphic 1.78:1 image is clean, if rather flat, while the DD5.1 audio is passable. Extras comprise three short EPK featurettes and two deleted scenes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

A dazzling dance of death

This Italian-made balletic horror looks stunning on Blu-ray

Suspiria remains the pinnacle of Dario Argento's 40-year career as a film director. Made in 1977, this Technicolor (fairy) tale of terror in a German ballet school is as much art as horror, mixing dazzling visuals with chilling scenes – all wrapped up with one of the most unnerving and innovative of soundtracks.

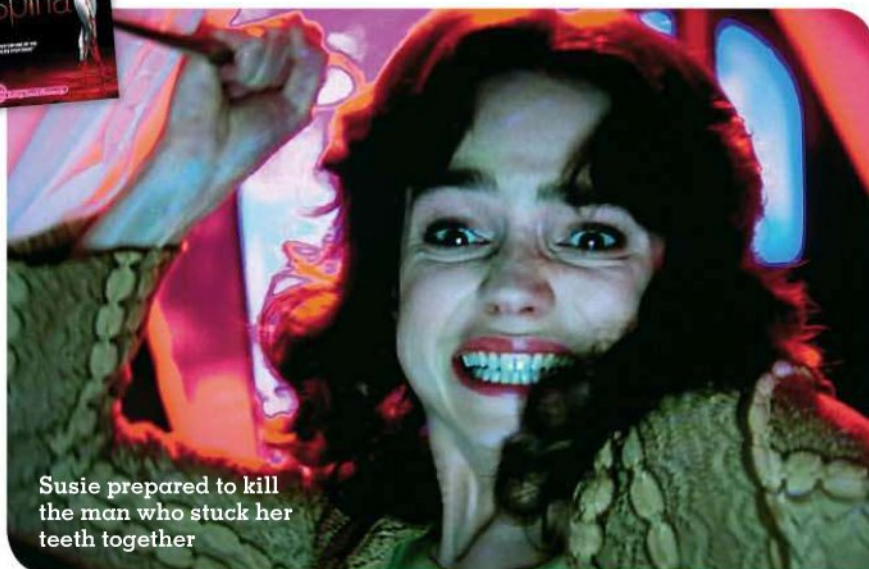
Anton van Beek: Over the years I've had the chance to experience *Suspiria* in a variety of forms – theatrical revivals, VHS, UK and US DVD releases – and Nouveaux's remastered Blu-ray blows them all out of the water. In fact, having run this review copy through an LED projector on a 12foot screen at the BFI, I'll be amazed if there's a better-looking version of this film in existence. Admittedly, I've not seen the much-maligned Italian Blu-ray, but this disc's stunning AVC

2.35:1 encode boasts none of the blown-out colours and boosted contrast that apparently blighted it. Instead it offers a sumptuously rich and detailed encode that appears to be much more in keeping with the three-strip Technicolor original. There are the usual colour bleed issues associated with that process, but this is a problem with the source, not this incredible hi-def presentation of Argento's masterpiece

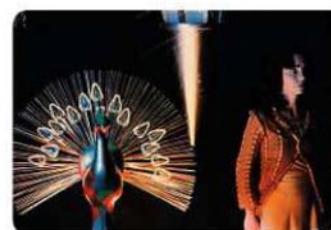
Rik Henderson: *Suspiria*'s soundtrack is every bit as important as its visuals, and while there's still no sign of the legendary original four-track mix, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 track featured here is an acceptable alternative. While there are still technical limitations surrounding the amount of dubbing and ADR used throughout, you can't knock what this mix does with Goblin's hypnotic and terrifying music, packing more punch than ever before.

Mark Craven: Argento's flick arrives in the UK with a trio of features created for this hi-def release. Most accessible is the audio commentary by genre experts Kim Newman and Alan Jones, which balances behind-the-scenes trivia with more general chat about the film. *Fear at 400 Degrees* (35 minutes) and *Suspiria Perspectives* (41 minutes) take a more scholarly look at the movie, its cultural relevance and themes, with input from the director himself, composer Claudio Simonetti, filmmaker Norman J Warren, critic Kim Newman and film academic Dr. Patricia MacCormack.

As part of the Cine Excess range, Nouveaux Pictures' disc also includes a 10-minute introduction to the imprint by lecturer Xavier Mendick.



Susie prepared to kill the man who stuck her teeth together

**HCC VERDICT**Suspiria → Nouveaux
Pictures → Region B BD
£20 Approx

We say: While lacking in extras, this remains the definitive release of this landmark piece of horror

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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Siam dunk

A film with more balls than plot

Fireball is the latest film to follow in *Shaolin Soccer*'s footsteps by combining martial arts with team sports – in this case, it's basketball and Thai boxing making unlikely bedfellows.

Needless to say, *Fireball* is an outrageously silly film, and one that appears to have either lost something in translation or just given up on any semblance of plotting in favour of ball-throwing, high-kicking action. Of course, silly doesn't always mean bad, and if you're in the mood for a stylish combination of dunks and flying kicks then you need look no further. Be aware though, its 97 minutes can seem rather tiring.

Mark Craven: Without wanting to seem like I'm confusing this fictional underground sport with football, *Fireball*'s hi-def debut is a bit of a game of two halves. Some of the visuals that the disc's AVC 1.85:1 encode serves up are a real slam-dunk – packed with detail and lustrous blacks. Just check out the spectacular rain-soaked match in Chapter 8 to see what I mean.

But elsewhere, such as Chapter 2's tea-house meeting between the rival gang bosses, the combination of poor lighting conditions and colour grading leads to a complete absence of shadow detail and washed-out, noise-riddled blacks that make the image look flat and ugly.

Steve May: This splattersport spectacular features an energetic 5.1 DTS-HD MA mix, presented in original Thai with English language subtitles. In truth, it's not a particularly sophisticated affair – the dialogue track isn't tonally matched to the score and sounds wafer thin – but the martial arts FX hit like a careening



Those cats are fast as lightning



tuk-tuk. The highlight is Chapter 8's rain-soaked centre-court (again), in which an army of Foley artists obliterate

a container-load of melons to the sound of badly-looped crowd chanting.

Rather unhelpfully the disc also comes with a two-channel PCM stereo mix, which cowers timidly in the corner of the court whenever a badass basketball sequence begins.

Anton van Beek: While a quick glance at the Blu-ray's pop-up Bonus Features menu might lead you to think that *Fireball* comes stacked with extras, the truth is there's not much substance to these supplementary bits and pieces compiled by EI Entertainment. The interviews with the director, producer and three lead actors add some background information, but are painfully short. Meanwhile, the Behind-the-Scenes featurette is just five minutes of raw footage taken from the shoot. Even the trio of deleted scenes add little to the film. After this, all that's left are an outtake reel, two TV spots and a couple of trailers.



HCC VERDICT

Fireball
EI Entertainment → All-region
BD → £22 Approx

We say: This brash, dumb, but fun martial arts flick makes for a mediocre HD experience

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

(500) Days of Summer

20th Century Fox → Region B BD
£29 Approx



Even those normally immune to the lure of the rom-com might enjoy these offbeat 95 minutes.

Joseph Gordon-Levitt plays Tom, a 20-something looking back on his past relationship with Zoey Deschanel's Summer. The film plays with time, and is an inventive take on the genre seen from a male perspective, while the visual style is well served by Fox's AVC 2.40:1 encode. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is fine for the dialogue and music; extras include a short film that mashes up *(500) Days of Summer* with *Sid and Nancy*. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

It's a Wonderful Life

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



It's a Wonderful Life is up there with the greatest Hollywood classics, but you wouldn't know from

the appalling UK DVD releases it has over the years. Luckily, this Blu-ray platter puts it right, with a lovely crisp black-and-white AVC 1.33:1 encode sitting alongside a strong colourised version. Sadly, the audio is no more than a Dolby Digital 2.0 mix. Extras are limited to a PiP mode that lets you to watch the colourised film with the black-and-white original inset in a window, plus the trailer, and a subtitle trivia track. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Aliens in the Attic: Triple Play Ed

20th Century Fox → Region B BD/R2
DVD → £29 Approx



Remember *Gremlins*? Well, imagine it remade for kids, with a bunch of tweens fighting tiny aliens,

and idiotic adults stumbling around obliviously. That's *Aliens in the Attic* – a formulaic mix of silly jokes, dull FX and kung fu grannies. Still, this Blu-ray looks sumptuous, with an AVC 2.40:1 image that conjures up satisfying black levels and impressive colour saturation, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio features a lively use of the surrounds and excellent bass. Numerous featurettes and deleted scenes accompany DVD and Digital Copy iterations of the film. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Varietease/Teaserama

Nucleus Films → R2 DVD
£13 Approx (each)



You've seen the biopic *The Notorious Bettie Page* starring Gretchen Mol, now you can see the real

thing. Along with glamour icons such as Tempest Storm, '50s burlesque legend Bettie bumps and grinds through these two cutie clip compilations directed by legendary filth-merchant Irving Klaw. The picture and sound are unrestored, so don't expect a feast of video quality. The dancing and stripping is mild by today's standards, and the included comedians are lame, but the extras including interviews with modern burlesque stars add some value. **CJ**

1 2 3 4 5

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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

Retaining subtitles

I have been struggling for months to find the best equipment for my needs and I'm still confused. I'm extremely hard of hearing and must have subtitles on my recordings. Also, if there is something on the hard drive that I want to keep I'm very keen to be able to archive it to a DVD.

The trouble is that reviews and specifications don't always mention these details. Often you can get them from customer reviews but it is a monumental task wading through all the material.

Is there any guidance you can give me?

Ruth Clark, via email



Sony's RDR range of recorders will burn-in subtitles, too

drawn to this issue, for the benefit of those – like yourself – who suffer from impaired hearing. Thankfully, most leading-brand HDD/DVD recorders can be configured to record subtitles. The caveat is that they're permanently 'burnt' into the recording, and cannot be turned on or off like, say, the subtitles of commercial DVDs. With Sony's recent (RDR-HXD...) series, you can turn this feature on or off from the 'recording settings'

menu. When setting the timer of a Panasonic model (such as the DMR-EX79) it is possible to specify whether you would like subtitles recorded. Any recordings that are subsequently copied from the hard drive to DVD will of course retain their subtitles.

I want a big TV!

I have noticed a rather worrying trend with TV manufacturers and their product releases to this small and cash-strapped

island. That is: the larger screens are not making it to the UK.

I have been looking for a replacement TV and had decided to treat myself & buy a 50in+ model. I decided upon an LED, with specific interest in the Philips 52PFL9704 as well as the Samsung 55in 8000 series.

Sony's 55X4500 was initially in the frame when its price dropped below £3,000 but now that it has moved back to its previous price I cannot bring myself to shell out that much... >

Star Letter

It is a pity that more attention is not

All these features are redundant!

I'm increasingly concerned about the direction AV tech is heading. It seems a new piece of kit is launched every month which has the latest 'must-have' feature – much of which is redundant to the average British buyer. The latest receivers can drive 7.1, plus additional height/width speakers and/or has software that can transform AV signals to produce ever more tricks.

But who are these receivers designed for: Americans with large cinema rooms, or Brits with small rooms? The standard British household does not have a room that can be used for a dedicated cinema with 11 speakers and two subs. Most of us make do with a small room, or have an understanding partner who allows us to turn the living room into a home cinema.

My two-year-old Onkyo AVR has features I don't use, so why would I want to 'upgrade'? Is it just me, or are we paying for redundant features at the expense of quality 5.1 audio & HD video?

Rob, via email

Rob, you are very right and with every piece of technology today there will be lots of features that many buyers won't use. But AV manufacturers have to globalise products to get costs down to sensible levels, so building amps with all the bells and whistles is probably cheaper than trying to make many different amps for different markets. Moreover, with the plethora of decent satellite speakers around these days (check out KEF, B&W, Tannoy, etc) and good bass management in AV amps, fitting in 7.1 or a couple of extra front

channels high up for 9.1 should not be too much of a domestic disaster – particularly if you can hide the cables when decorating. And while most Blu-rays are 5.1, quite a few do supply 7.1 native soundtracks and Dolby ProLogic IIz processing for 9.1 has got to be heard to be believed – it's great!

Winner: Star Letter-writer Rob wins four Blu-rays courtesy of Universal Pictures. They're available to buy now, priced at around £20 each.



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So I went in search of the two remaining items only to find that they are not available in the UK.

Can you find out why we Brits don't warrant the big screens?
J. Peterson, via email

Samsung's 55in 8000 Series LED TV does retail in the UK, but so far numbers have been limited. You can get the 55in 7000 Series, but you'll miss out on local dimming and 200Hz. Philips 52in LED screen is on sale in Europe, but not here.

So, why the lack of big screen LEDs? It's probably because the manufacturers don't think they'll sell very many of them. Seeing as the 46in Philips Pro LED model retails for £2,500, it's likely the 52in version will be more than £3,000. A similar premium would be expected for a 55in 8000 Series Samsung.

Have you considered a plasma set? There are plenty of these available from LG, Samsung and Panasonic in big sizes and at much more agreeable prices. For instance, we found LG's 60in PS8000 model available for £1,500 from Curry's.

LNB letdown

Hi, I bought the Humax Foxsat-HDR Freesat recorder. You highly recommend it, and it is a good machine. The question I would like to ask is, why does nowhere on the box or on the website does it say that to use the twin tuners you need to have twin cables running from the dish. If I had known this I would not have purchased it. I have been quoted from £65 to £120 to fit another cable to my dish. The only mention of the twin feeds is in

the instruction book, and as there is actually nothing wrong with the machine I cannot return it. I feel that Humax is not being upfront with its information. I've written to the company, and had no response.

Bill Winstanley, via email

When we reviewed Humax's Foxsat-HDR, we did mention that it requires twin aerial feeds if you want to get the benefits of twin tuner recorders. However, we can understand how buyers could easily miss this – as you point out, Humax makes no mention of it on its website, and you have to download the 107-page manual and get to page 16 before you get to the part about dish connection.

A halfway house would be to connect your dish to the rear-panel 'LNB 1 IN' connector, and then feed the 'LNB 1 OUT' socket to the 'LNB 2 IN' terminal. You'll need to make (or have made) a short cable for the purpose, from two screw-on 'F' connectors and a length of satellite-grade coaxial cable. This process, known as 'loopthrough', will enable you to use both tuners of your PVR. It's a compromise, though, because the first tuner influences what the second will be able to receive.

This is because satellite broadcasting uses a technique called 'polarisation' to maximise the number of services that can be carried in the available spectrum. On the Freesat (and Sky) platforms, the transponders that carry the channels can be vertically or horizontally polarised. The LNB, under control of the receiver, selects the polarity

that's appropriate for the selected channel.

The upshot is that the second tuner will only be able to access channels that are of the same 'polarity' as the channel to which the first one is tuned. In other words, around half of the total number of channels will be denied to the second tuner at any given point. If you're receiving, say, BBC1 London (horizontal) with the first tuner then the second tuner will be able to receive BBC2 England or Channel Four (horizontal), but not ITV3 or BBC HD (both vertical).

Does the Denon do it?

Hi, I have a Denon AVR-3808 and I've just purchased a Panasonic G-series plasma. I'm looking to buy a mid-range Blu-ray player (possibly Sony BDP-S760) and I keep seeing specs which include x.v.Colour and DeepColour. What do these mean and, if I buy a BD player which supports x.v.Colour and DeepColour and connect everything via HDMI, will the Denon pass on the correct signal to the TV or would I have to connect the BD player directly to the TV?

Gary, via email

In layman's terms, DeepColour and x.v.Colour are technologies that expand the depth/gamut of the colour space in video material, resulting in, basically, more colourful pictures and less colour banding. As yet, no Blu-ray movie releases have made use of either format, although AVCHD files recorded on camcorders can offer x.v.Colour.

As for hardware, your TV is DeepColour and x.v.Colour compatible, and Denon's AVR-3808 will pass both DeepColour and x.v.Colour material through its HDMI repeater. But you may be waiting a long time for Blu-ray discs that support it to arrive ●

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Sony STR-DA5400ES • STR-DH800

These two award-winning A/V receivers from Sony deliver exceptional performance. Pictured STR-DA5400ES.



Onkyo

Onkyo raises the bar once again in the competitive world of home cinema with its TX-SR607 which features Dolby ProLogic IIz support.



Denon AVR-2310

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HI-FI SEPARATES

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This new CD and amplifier pairing continues Marantz's tradition of building superb budget products.



Arcam FMJ Series

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The dual mono designed Tucana II uses three heavy-duty toroidal power transformers, has a refined bi-polar output stage and is capable of swinging over forty five amps of current for precise control of the speakers.

Cyrus

Following the remarkable 'Servo Evolution' CD players, Cyrus has introduced a range of amplifiers featuring circuitry developed for its DAC XP. The 8 XP d and Pre XP d include digital inputs - ideal for playing music stored on your computer - while the entry model, 6 XP, is based on the 8 XP but without the digital option. All also include two-zone multiroom capability.



The award-winning 'Servo Evolution' CD players - CD6 SE, CD8 SE & CDX 1 SE/DAC X



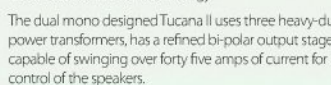
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Roksan replaces its hugely successful Kandy series with the Kandy K2 amplifier and matching CD player.



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ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS

Denon D-M37DAB

Denon's micro systems are back. This award-winning model, available in silver or black, features a CD player, capable of reading MP3 and WMA discs, a DAB tuner, and 30W amplifier. **Optional** SC-M37 speakers.



Teac Reference 600

Award-winning system comprising the PD-H600 CD player and AG-H600DNT receiver. Features include both wired and wireless network connections for internet radio, a DAB tuner and a healthy 2 x 75 W power output.



Arcam Solo Mini

Award-winning integrated CD, Radio and Amplifier with iPod control via optional iLead/iDock.



B&W Zeppelin

This award-winning iPod docking station ticks all the boxes: it's beautiful, solid as a rock and sounds amazing!



Also Available: NEW Zeppelin Mini

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

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MORE at SSAV.com

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MORE at SSAV.com

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SOUND AND VISION

★★★★★

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SOUND AND VISION

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SOUND AND VISION

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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

★★★★★

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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

★★★★★

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no
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HCC Ratings key

Officially awesome 1 2 3 4 **5**
Essential purchase 1 2 3 4 **5**
Does the job 1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing 1 2 3 4 5
Don't touch it **1** 2 3 4 5

LCD TV

Best on test...



SONY
46in → KDL-46Z5800
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

First ever Bravia with a built-in Freesat HD tuner

Highs: Picture performance; 200Hz tech put to good use
Lows: CCFL-backlight; limited net interactivity

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and Freesat HD and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



TOSHIBA
46in → 46SV685DB
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Debut LED-backlit screen from Tosh is a real eye-opener

Highs: Excellent contrast and detail; good quality audio; multimedia talents
Lows: Not particularly stylish

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.toshiba.co.uk



SAMSUNG
46in → UE-46B8000
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top-flight edge-lit LED panel will sell like hot cakes

Highs: Outstanding picture quality; 200Hz works well
Lows: Some of the settings are awful; limited viewing angle

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
42in → 42SL8000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

LG's debut 'Seamless' LCD is excellent value for money

Highs: Colour fidelity and contrast; connectivity; design
Lows: Take care when using the 200Hz mode

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



SHARP
52in → LC52LE700E
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Bigscreen LED LCD with calibration skills

Highs: Low power use; bright, involving pictures
Lows: Muted reds; poor off-axis viewing; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (& CI slot)

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.sharp.co.uk

Also Recommended...



SONY
46in → KDL-46Z5500
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

2009 Z-Series builds upon previous Bravia know-how

Highs: Wonderfully detailed pictures; bright, crisp colours
Lows: Black levels are a tad light; poor off-axis viewing

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



SAMSUNG
32in → LE32B650
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Net-savvy 32incher is a real bargain buy

Highs: Huge feature count; excellent HD pics; sexy design
Lows: SD performance and audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
32in → 32LH4000
£460 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Budget offering from LG delivers where it counts

Highs: Exceptional value; good design, connectivity and images
Lows: Black levels; restricted viewing angle; audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk

Editor's Choice...

PHILIPS
56in → Cinema 21:9
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Philips' groundbreaking ultra widescreen TV needs to be seen to be believed. It's deceptively large (about as wide as a traditional 65in TV) and genuinely brings a sense of cinema to your 2.35:1 movies. Expanded 16:9 material is surprisingly watchable, too. There are other frills here – Ambilight, 200Hz processing, five HDMI inputs, Net TV and DLNA certification – but it's the forward-thinking design and technology of the 21:9 that will blow you away. Whether the concept takes hold remains to be seen, though.

Tested: Issue 171
For more info visit: www.philips.co.uk

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
2560 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Plasma TV

Best on test...



PIONEER
60in → KRP-600A
£5,000 Approx



Kuro with separate media box, Ethernet and satellite tuner

Highs: Awesome black levels; colour accuracy; slim panel; media-savvy
Lows: Problems with AVI files

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot and DVB-S2 tuner)

Tested: Issue 164
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
65in → TX-P65V10B
£4,500 Approx



Currently the biggest, bestest plasma you can buy

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; Freesat HD
Lows: Lack of manual colour temp controls; sucks electricity

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50V10B
£1,900 Approx



THX-certified, Viera Cast-touting NeoPDP

Highs: THX mode is stunning out of the box; good feature set
Lows: Unspectacular black level response; a bit chunky

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PIONEER
50in → PDP-LX5090
£2,500 Approx



Baby brother of the LX6090 Kuro panel

Highs: Unbelievable contrast and black levels; superb detail
Lows: Speakers are an optional extra only

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 159
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



LG
32in → 32PG6000
£500 Approx



World's smallest 32in plasma challenges LCD rivals

Highs: Smooth movement; good blacks and connectivity
Lows: Lack of detail; some jagged edges; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus analogue)

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk

Also Recommended...



LG
50in → 50PG6000
£1,100 Approx



Superb HD Ready plasma offering great value for money

Highs: Extensive calibration possibilities; excellent black level; sexy bezel
Lows: Not Full HD

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1366 x 768 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 154
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
37in → TH-37PX80
£650 Approx



Small PDP from Panasonic continues the Viera vibe

Highs: Beautiful blacks; natural colours; good GUI
Lows: HDMI v1.2 inputs lack DeepColor support

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3 (v1.2)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx



Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail
Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 161
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
46in → TX-P46Z1
£4,300 Approx



THX certification, full 1080p wireless transmission, ultra-thin design...

Panasonic's flagship plasma TV is a giant leap forward for the display technology. Add in the Freesat HD tuner, Viera Cast and DLNA networkability and stunning HD and SD pictures and you begin to understand the premium price tag. Some might argue that its black levels aren't as jaw-dropping as a Pioneer Kuro – but those screens aren't being made any more. The Z1 is simply the best plasma TV you can buy.

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes (up to 1080p/24)
Native resolution: 1920 x 1080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4 (v1.3)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (and Freesat)



Blu-ray Players

Best on test...



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX91
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference status BD deck is also a first-rate CD and DVD player

Highs: Stunning picture; great sound; packed with features and well-designed

Lows: Precision Quartz Lock System works with CDs only

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet

Tested: Issue 167
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-P3600
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top-level Samsung BD spinner

Highs: Impressive pics and sound; 7.1-channel output; DivX HD playback

Lows: No WMA support; PC streaming tricky to set up; Wi-Fi requires dongle

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, Wi-Fi via supplied dongle, USB

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
Blu-ray → BD390
£290 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Improved players sports more features than BD370

Highs: Excellent performance; 1GB internal storage; Wi-Fi net connection, 7.1 analogue outputs

Lows: Audio can't match its premium BD rivals

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet/Wi-Fi (including YouTube), USB

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BD80
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Flagship 2009 deck adds YouTube fun to top-class specs

Highs: Full multichannel outputs; superb, detailed images; net functionality

Lows: Uninspired design; sluggish loading times

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, VieraCast, SD card slot, USB 2.0

Tested: Issue 169
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



DENON
Blu-ray → DBP-1610
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Affordable Denon deck benefits from brand's attention to detail

Highs: Good, natural-looking picture; quality audio performance; great value

Lows: No analogue outs; slow to load our test disc

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, SD card slot for BD-Live

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S760 → £380 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Sony has a few Blu-ray decks now that are comfortably better than its PlayStation 3 console, and the keenly-priced S760 is our favourite. It incorporates the HD Reality Enhancer and Super Bit-Mapping picture-processing tech of its £1,200 BDP-S5000ES stablemate (albeit in a thinner chassis) and the results are startling – detailed, deep, colour-rich HD visuals and quality surround sound delivery. Some might miss the lack of esoteric codec support (no MKV here, folks) but that's not what this Sony is about – consider it a reference machine for the budget-conscious.

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Also Recommended



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX52
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stripped-down LX-branded player is a mid-range marvel

Highs: Class-leading picture and sound

Lows: Not simple to get to grips with; multichannel PQLS function only works on LPCM

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Yes via Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PHILIPS
Blu-ray → BDP7300
£230 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Debut UK deck from Philips was worth the wait

Highs: Internal 1GB storage; multichannel analogue outputs; vivid, detailed image

Lows: Stylised 'curved' look not for everyone

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (5.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes via Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S360
£190 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Affordable Sony Blu-ray is a real rival to its PS3

Highs: Stylish design and good AV performance; very solid construction

Lows: External memory required for BD-Live access

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk

Recorders

Best on test...



SONY
DVDVR → RDR-HXD995
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Heavyweight Freeview+ unit with features galore

Highs: Excellent AV performance; flexible recording modes; multimedia prowess

Lows: Records 'interactive red dot'; possible aerial sensitivity

→ Specifications

HDD size: 250GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



HUMAX
Freesat PVR → Foxsat HDR
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

First Freesat HD PVR brings extra clout to fledgling system

Highs: Cinch to operate; good performance; ITV in HD; JPEG/MP3 playback

Lows: Annoying LCD; slow to boot up; needs more HD content!

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD (satellite – requires dish)
HDMI: Yes
Component output: No
CI slot: Yes
Freeview+: No

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



SAGEM
PVR → DTR67500T
£180 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

500GB Freeview+ PVR with USB archiving

Highs: Capacious HDD; flexible and intuitive EPG; picture quality is excellent

Lows: No way of importing recordings from other devices

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
CI slot: No
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



LG
DVDR/3.1 → HRT403DA
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Convergence king offers 3.1 audio and HDD/DVD recording

Highs: Acceptable, punchy audio; well-specified recorder; quality DVD pictures

Lows: Lacks DTS support; no 5.1 upgrade path

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



TOPFIELD
PVR → TF5810PVR
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Freeview+ PVR with enormous 500GB HDD

Highs: Easy to use; PC connectivity; upscales Freeview; twin tuners offer great flexibility

Lows: Competing with high-end DVD recorders

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
CI slot: Yes
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 156
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Also recommended



PIONEER
DVDR → DVR-560HX
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Full PC-linked multimedia jukebox and DVD/HDD unit

Highs: Excellent AV performance and features spread; networkability

Lows: Jukebox abilities reliant on Windows Media Player

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital & analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 159
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



PANASONIC
DVDR → DMR-EX79
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

2009 DVD/HDD recorder improves slightly on the EX78

Highs: AV performance is first-rate; heaps of features and recording flexibility

Lows: No STB control; can't copy DivX/JPEG to HDD

→ Specifications

HDD size: 250GB
Twin tuners: No, 1 x digital only
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



HUMAX
PVR → PVR-9300T
£200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Souped-up Humax drops USB socket but boosts HDD capacity

Highs: Easy and responsive to use; fine AV performance; well-featured

Lows: Limited HDMI modes; no USB functionality

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
CI slot: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
DVD/BDR → DMR-BS850 → £1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



With its 500GB HDD, twin Freesat HD tuners, profile 2.0 Blu-ray player/recorder and Viera Cast online interactivity, this Panasonic deck is clearly the king of convergence. As a BD-spinner it's solid, sharing the gizzards of the brand's DMP-BD60, and as a PVR it's simply brilliant, with the mix of hard disc and Blu-ray drive allowing for all sorts of archiving and editing possibilities. The USB, firewire and SD inputs – and in-built Gracenote database – add even more flexibility.

Tested: Issue 170
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/reviews

→ Specifications

Hard disk: 500GB
Twin Tuners: Yes 2 x Freesat HD
Component output: Yes (progressive)
Freeview+: No, it's Freesat
Format: BD-RE, BD-R, DVD-R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

AV Receivers

Best on test...



PIONEER
AVR → SC-LX82
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

ICE-powered AIR Studios-tuned AVR replaces the SC-LX81

Highs: Punchy, highly detailed sound; brilliant features; looks fabulous; solid build

Lows: Pioneer doesn't do height/width processing

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 190W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: THX Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



SONY
AVR → STR-DA5400ES
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Class-leading mid-priced AVR with power and poise

Highs: Excellent build; audiophile SACD and CD playback; full of power

Lows: No Ethernet port, THX certification or DAB radio

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 5-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 166
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR807
£800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Powerful and potent height/width processor at a great price

Highs: Full-on gung-ho sound with massive bass; DSX/DPLIIz processing; excellent upscaling

Lows: Slightly flimsy build; no USB or multichannel inputs

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 180W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/Net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Select2 Plus
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



DENON
AVR → AVR-4310
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Audyssey DSX-toting AVR will change the way you think about speaker placement

Highs: Awesome sound as standard; extra width and height channels are a boon

Lows: Lacks the 9.1 DSX option

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk



DENON
AVR → AVR-2309
£600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Mid-range HD audio unit lacks networking but sounds superb

Highs: Fabulous balance with HD audio; punchy sound with CDs; powerful

Lows: No networking and only 1 HDMI output

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 100W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

ARCAM
AVR → AVR600
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



British manufacturer Arcam arrived late to the HD audio party, but the AVR600 is certainly worth the wait. Utilising a Class G analogue amplifier, this silver machine is cool-running and efficient, while an entire 'root and branch' overhaul of multichannel AV amp design has allowed Arcam to tackle audio jitter head on. Yet this isn't purely an audiophile product – it's packed with custom install features, offers an insane array of connections, and delivers Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA Blu-ray mixes with aplomb. A class act from a classic brand.

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit: www.arcam.co.uk

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling to HDMI: Yes
Tuner: DAB/AM/FM
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and Zone 3
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: No
Component input: 5
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Also Recommended...



NAD
AVR → T747
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent AVR offers more grunt than its specs suggest

Highs: Storming all-round performance; eases you into every film; simple to use

Lows: No Ethernet or USB inputs; DAB costs extra

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 60W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.nadelectronics.com



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR3007
£1,700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

9.2-channel HD receiver oozes power and performance

Highs: Solid, three-dimensional audio; excellent upscaler

Lows: You might not use all the features; looks like every other Onk on the market

→ Specifications

Power: 9 x 200W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM, 'net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Yes, Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 7-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



YAMAHA
Amp → DSP-Z7
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Trimmed-down version of the award-winning Z11

Highs: Large sound with huge bass and plenty of detail

Lows: Orange display; disconcerting pops when changing sources

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: No ('net only)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (5.1)

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.yamaha-uk.com

Projectors

Best on test...



SIM2
DLP → Grand Cinema
C3X 1080
£23,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference-status PJ with brilliant colour management

Highs: Gorgeous design; small form factor; dazzling pictures

Lows: SD processing isn't quite hi-end enough for the price

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): NA
Contrast (claimed): 10,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 169
For more info visit:
www.sim2.co.uk



EPSON
LCD → EH-TW3800
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A flawless example of cutting-edge 1080p LCD PJ technology

Highs: Quiet in operation; looks classy; superb picture; easy setup

Lows: Higher-end rivals deliver deeper black levels

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 18,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167
For more info visit:
www.epson.co.uk



JVC
D-ILA → HD350
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Fantastically filmic PJ is a steal at £3,500

Highs: Stunning picture quality; runs quietly; easy and flexible to setup

Lows: No direct PC hookup; DLP rivals may be brighter

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 30,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167
For more info visit:
www.jvc.co.uk



OPTOMA
DLP → Themescene HD82
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A tasty development of a distinguished product line

Highs: Good blacks levels; impressive colour performance; easy to set up

Lows: Some dynamic iris noise; some DLP rainbow effect

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed): 20,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.optoma.co.uk



PANASONIC
LCD → PT-AE4000
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Updated flagship PJ adds red-rich lamp and 12V trigger

Highs: Smooth filmic pictures; easy to setup and use; handy feature set

Lows: Boxy design; be careful with high frame-rate settings

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 100,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk

Also Recommended...



CINEVERSUM
LCoS → BlackWing One
£4,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sexily-styled French LCoS model undercuts JVC and Sony

Highs: Sharp; colourful images; versatile setup and installation options

Lows: Average black level lets the BlackWing One down

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,200 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.cineversum.com



OPTOMA
DLP → HD20
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Wallet-friendly model is an ideal first projector

Highs: Excellent detail resolution; reasonable contrast and brightness

Lows: Some fan noise; rainbow effect; limited throw distance

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,700 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 500:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 29dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.optoma.co.uk



VIVITEK
DLP → H9080FD
£10,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The world's first 'lampless' LED projector

Highs: Excellent colour fidelity; great definition; long lifespan

Lows: Lacks brightness; early adopters pay for the innovative LED tech

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead for PC hookup
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com

Editor's Choice...

SONY
SXR → VPL-VW850
£5,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



The successor to the well-received VW80 again shows that Sony's SXR-branded LCoS wizardry can take on any challengers in the high-end projector market. The copious picture tweaks available mean achieving a truly cinematic picture is a doddle; the astonishing contrast ratio and detail levels help, too. Add in the 12V trigger, bundled gamma adjustment software and near silent running, and we reckon this could become an installers' fave.

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk/biz

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: VGA
Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 120,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Speaker Systems

Best on test...



BOSTON ACOUSTICS
5.1 → VS Series
£5,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Enormous sound; scintillating HF performance
Lows: Subwoofer feels underpowered compared to surrounds

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 400, 3 x 250W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.bostonacoustics.com



PIONEER
5.1 → EX Series
£11,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A stunning 5.1 system to match the brand's high-quality components

Highs: Breathtaking accuracy; beautiful imagery and detail; sexy design and solid build
Lows: Demands specific room placement

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 160W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears (at a stretch...)

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → Vector
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

5.1 sub/sat system ideal for a small room home cinema

Highs: Easy to wall-mount; rugged build quality; thrilling surround sound performance
Lows: Subwoofer is punchy and fast, but lacks depth

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 80W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Matt; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.monitoraudio.com



TEUFEL
5.1 → System 9
€4,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent THX Ultra2-system with industrial styling and build

Highs: Great bass extension; huge scale and accuracy; pleasing to look at, too
Lows: Stands or wall bracket fittings are extra; subwoofer is huuuuuge!

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 3 x 240W, 1 x 180W
Rears: Dipole
Subwoofer: 700W
Finish: Alu; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 166
For more info visit:
www.teufel.eu/



MISSION
5.1 → 79 Series
£2,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Floor-standing system with innovative side-firing bass drivers

Highs: Sophisticated and clean-sounding; excellent stereo imagery; easy on the eye
Lows: Not the most powerful or deepest bass in its class; won't go super-loud

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 200W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears only

Tested: Issue 171
For more info visit:
www.mission.co.uk

Also Recommended...



JAMO
5.1 → A102 HCS 5
£330 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Good-value 5.1 system with living-room-friendly size/looks

Highs: Relaxed, intelligible dialogue presentation; available online for as little as £200
Lows: Subwoofer lacks real subterranean power; small satellites lend a rawness to the audio

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 60W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Cherry; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit:
www.jamo.com



WHARFEDALE
5.1 → Diamond 10 HCP
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sub/sat system mixes hi-fi roots with a 10in woofer

Highs: Powerful subwoofer; exciting treble; highly musical
Lows: A little bright at high volume; might not be visceral enough for action movie fans

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 4 x 75W, 1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 150W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.wharfedale.co.uk



MJ ACOUSTICS
5.1 → Xeno
£800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish 5.1 sub/sat system with remarkable voice

Highs: Compact design; strong centre channel; feisty, versatile subwoofer
Lows: Lacks the scale of dispersion required for larger rooms

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 4 x 100W, 1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 120W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 161
For more info visit:
www.mjacoustics.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

KEF
5.1 → XQ Series
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

This KEF 5.1 array mixes standmount surrounds with two hulking floorstanders to deliver a massive cinematic audio

experience that's hard to fault – an ideal blend of deep bass, spacious mid-band and crystal clear treble. The design is gorgeous, too – another KEF masterclass in gloss black cabinets (curved to reduce internal reflections) and clearly taking a lead from the brand's awe-inspiring Reference system. Other variants of the speakers are available, so you can spec a more affordable, smaller-room setup should you wish.

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit: www.kef.com/gb

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 200W, 2 x 120W, 1 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 200W
Finish: Gloss
Bookshelf: No chance

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(25TH JULY 2010)

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Subwoofers

Best on test...



NAIM
SW → n-Sub
£1,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Class AB amp-driven premium-level subwoofer

Highs: Rich, textured bass with tight control; innovative features

Lows: High-end rivals have a bit more grunt to 'em

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 2-Hz-250Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 350W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 29.6kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.naim-audio.com



MARTINLOGAN
SW → Descent I
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Weapons-grade unit with 3 x 10in woofers

Highs: Superb engineering; Reference standard performance

Lows: Bulky and premium-priced; no automated setup

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 3 x 10in
Weight: 47.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 167
For more info visit:
www.martinlogan.com



BOWERS & WILKINS
SW → ASW608
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Compact subwoofer ideal for smaller rooms

Highs: Excellent grip and musical low-end control

Lows: Limited by its size

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 23Hz-140Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 200W
Driver: 8in
Weight: 8.85kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 160
For more info visit:
www.bowers-wilkins.com



VELODYNE
SW → DD-10
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

We love the see-thru version of this excellent bass shifter

Highs: Thrilling performance, special edition finishes

Lows: You can get more muscle for the money

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,250W
Driver: 10in
Weight: 26kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 158
For more info visit:
www.velodyne.com



VELODYNE
SW → SPL-1200 Ultra
From £1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent sub – now with custom finish options

Highs: Tight, powerful bass; useful auto-calibration

Lows: Few added benefits over the step-down model

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 21-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 22kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
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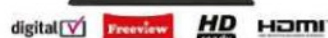


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